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ANTHOLGOY OF K-12 LANGUAGE ARTS ACTION RESEARCH

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Table of Contents for Language Arts

Backus, Lester.....	3
Will A Spiraling Spelling Curriculum Based On A Single 450 Word List Increase Student Retention And Transference Into Daily Writing?	
Fisher, Jodi.....	2
1 Will Implementing A Reading Fluency Program Based On Current Research Increase My Students' Fluency And Reading Comprehension?	
Heppding, Colleen.....	42
Will Exposing English Language Learners To Children's Literature Increase Their Reading Levels?	
Kyllo, Amanda.....	7
0 Does Accelerated Reader Have Positive And Motivational Effects On Student Reading Levels And Student Attitude Toward Reading?	
Matuska, Amy.....	100
Does The Method Of Reading Help Improve Student Comprehension?	
May, Brenda.....	121
Will Using A Classroom Word Wall Help Students Successfully Learn High Frequency Words?	

Peck,
Laura.....
.....158

The Effects Of Repeated Guided Oral Reading On The
Reading Fluency Of First Grade Students.

Pischke,
Sheryl.....194

Does The Addition Of A Repeated Reading Component To An
Existing Reading Curriculum Improve Student Reading?

Rojas,
Beth.....
.....237

Does The Direct Vocabulary Instruction Of High Frequency
Words Increase A Student's Fluency And Comprehension?

Winters,
Elizabeth.....271

Will The Implementation Of A Guided Reading Program
Improve Running Record Scores?

WILL A SPIRALING SPELLING CURRICULUM BASED ON A SINGLE 450 WORD
LIST INCREASE STUDENT RETENTION AND TRANSFERENCE INTO DAILY
WRITING?

by
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This capstone entitled:

Will a spiraling spelling curriculum based on a single 450-word list increase student retention and transference into daily writing?

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Will a spiraling spelling curriculum based on a single 450-word list increase student retention and transference into daily writing?

Capstone directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman

Abstract

Teachers have long viewed spelling as a troublesome subject to teach. The traditional method of teaching spelling is ineffective at its best, and detrimental at its worst. Giving students a list on Monday, and a test on Friday simply does not work. It fails to hold students accountable for the words past Friday. Inevitably, students will forget the vast majority of their list by the following Monday so they can memorize the next list just long enough to pass the next test. This is a waste of valuable teaching and learning time.

This study focused on a spiraling curriculum for spelling at the fifth grade level. Students were given a list at the beginning of the year consisting of 450 words, 150 of these words were new to them. This program starts with kindergarten students. Kindergarten students are given a list of 25 words. Each year, this list is added to, but follows the students through school culminating in fifth grade with a list of 450 words. These words come from various sources, but concentrated on essential words for writing success, most commonly misspelled words, and phonemic patterns. Each week, a random list of 21 words is generated, making students accountable for all the words on their list.

During the first quarter of the school year, students were given a dictation piece containing 73 words from their spelling list. The students' papers were graded counting only the words from their lists. During the fourth quarter of the school year, the same dictation piece was given again. Again, only the words from the list were graded. Every

student tested showed improvement in retention. This retention was displayed in the students' daily writing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Need for the Study	1
	Statement of the Problem	1
	Statement of the Hypothesis	2
	Definition of Terms	3
	Variables	3
	Independent	3
	Dependent	4
	Control	4
	Limitations of the Study	4
II.	LITERATURE REVIEW	6
III.	METHODS AND PROCEDURES	9
	Overview	9
	Research Design	9
	Subjects	11
	Instruments and Measuring Devices	11
	Validity Measures	12
	Reliability Measures	12
	Procedures	12
	Conclusion	13
IV.	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	14
V.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	17

INTRODUCTION

Longfellow Elementary School has long struggled with making spelling a more meaningful, practical activity. When some of the staff went to see Lee Jenkins give his “Data Not Guesswork” seminar, they reported back on what he said. Using his model, the classroom teachers decided to create a new spelling curriculum for the school. Lee Jenkins said that our current practice of teaching spelling was giving students “permission to forget” the words. It was decided that students should be held accountable for all of their spelling words.

Need for the Study

When student daily writing was examined, it was found that many students were misspelling words that had very recently been on a spelling test. This helped to show that the current spelling curriculum was not effective. Students were not transferring what was being taught in spelling into their daily writing. Longfellow took one staff representative from each grade level to participate in developing a new spelling curriculum. After having the program in place for a couple of years it seemed time to study the data and see if it was indeed an effective way of teaching spelling. It was an opportunity to determine if something in the program should be altered, or if it was fine as it was implemented.

Statement of the Problem

Students in our school were not showing retention of their spelling words, or transference into their daily writing. The staff decided to correct this problem. The traditional method of teaching spelling had proved itself ineffective. Time constraints and a large curriculum that must be taught makes it difficult to teach spelling during writing time. The Rochester School District had recently implemented a new writing curriculum that demanded at least three sessions a week of 45 minutes to an hour a session. It was necessary to develop a spelling curriculum that would address this problem. It was believed that the repetition one gets from a spiraling curriculum will benefit students. It was believed that it would increase retention, and help their spelling in daily writing.

Statement of the Hypothesis

Will a spiraling spelling curriculum based on a single 450-word list increase student retention and transference into daily writing?

Purpose of the Study

Using the Continuous Improvement model that the Rochester School District had implemented, and the Lee Jenkins “Data Not Guesswork” seminar, it was discovered that the traditional spelling curriculum had no aim. The district had stressed how important it was to have all goals aligned. Without aligned goals, the district cannot be an effective educational institution.

Definition of Terms

The Spiral Method: This is a method of teaching in which the students are not expected to gain mastery the first time a new concept is covered. The concept is taught briefly, and then it keeps coming back throughout the curriculum. Over time the students will gain mastery.

Student Run Chart: Data plotted on a graph over time used to show patterns in the data. The individual student maintains this particular graph.

Scatter Diagram: A graph that plots two variables and is used to study the relationship between the two variables.

Continuous Improvement: A system of improvement based on setting goals and priorities. These goals are tracked using visually accessible graphs and charts for the students to see.

Variables

Independent variables.

This test was conducted using fifth grade students. These students came from very diverse backgrounds including ethnic, and socio-economic. Out of the 19 students participating in this study, five had been diagnosed with various learning disabilities including: ADHD, EBD, LD, and anxiety disorder. This class included six ESOL students. This school had a free and reduced rate of approximately 75%. There were also a large number of migrant families. Many of these students did not attend school at all while they were away from Minnesota. If they did, they certainly did not have the same spelling program, let alone the same words. Student absences also play a role in the success of any curriculum. There were a few students who participated in this study with attendance difficulties. One student had missed 17 days in the first half of the year. This severely limited the time spent on spelling. Due to the nature of the spiraling curriculum, the words chosen for testing every week were chosen randomly. The instructor did not choose them.

Dependent variables.

The students' retention of spelling words, and their transference into daily writing were the results being measured in this study.

Control variables.

This study was conducted in the same classroom, with all students being tested in the same manner. All the students were together for the dictation piece. If any students were absent during a dictation day, it was postponed until all were present. The classroom teacher was the only person administering the dictation piece. The classroom teacher also controlled how spelling was taught throughout the week.

Limitations of the Study

One of the major limitations to this study was the fact that this curriculum was based on the students becoming familiar with the words in their lower grades, and retaining them throughout their upper grades. The group being studied had only had this program for two years. Ideally the group being studied would have had the curriculum since kindergarten. However, since this class had the program in Fourth Grade, they were at least familiar with the program.

In the class being studied there were all different levels of abilities. Yet all were tested on the same level. The student with the anxiety disorder had a condition that prevented her from doing well in stressful situations, including tests. This could have affected her scores.

Help received at home was a large limitation. Most of the students in this class did not get parental support with their studying. This made it very difficult to motivate students to look at their spelling words outside of school.

Time constraints were another major limitation to this study. There is a large, and ever growing, curriculum to be taught. Demands of testing have limited the time available to teach spelling on a daily basis

LITERATURE REVIEW

It has become obvious that not many people were happy with the way spelling was taught in the schools. Most agree that it had no aim or direction in its implementation. Some research called spelling lists "...artificial and isolated." (Henderson, 1990). The Rochester School District had implemented the practice of Continuous Improvement. With the focus on setting goals, and having all goals aligned, it became obvious after doing the research that spelling, as it is currently taught, has no place in this model. "Spelling instruction is an example of an aimless segment of education." "The spelling test in week 1 generally has nothing to do with week 2 spelling or any other week's spelling" (Jenkins, 1997). Lee Jenkins compared the necessity of aim in education to a car. Jenkins stated that you could select the best components from the best cars in the world, but when you combine them, you will not have a functioning automobile. To get a car that works, you must have all the components that work together. "Spelling instruction is an example of an aimless segment of education" (Jenkins, 1997). Spelling instruction had stagnated into a series of Friday tests. How could students know if they were successful in spelling?

"They don't know, because nobody told them the aim in spelling. The spelling test in week 1 generally has nothing to do with week 2 spelling or any other week's spelling. It is merely a collection of Friday tests that, when added up, equal a collection of tests. So, the first step in improving spelling instruction in any school district is to establish an aim" (p.3).

What students were told was to take home this list, and memorize it for a test on Friday. This practice caused boredom in many students. Students want things that are relevant to their lives and their learning. Eric Jenson tells us that students learn best when they see the connection to their lives (Jenson, 1999). Generally if they can't make that connection, they won't be interested. If they aren't interested, it is hard for them to learn. Traditional spelling programs do not motivate students to learn. In fact, these programs often de-motivate students. The largest hazard to this is that once students are turned away from a subject, it is almost impossible to get them back. Lee Jenkins asks if anybody had ever heard, "I loved math in grades 2, 5, and 8". This doesn't happen according to Jenkins. Instead what was heard was, "I loved math until grade x, and then I

never liked it again” (Jenkins, 1997). It is hoped that no educator sets out with the aim to de-motivate students, but it is the sad fact that the resistance to change will do just that.

Research also showed that for spelling to be effective, it must be implemented with writing (Roser, 1987). The words students really need to know are the words they need to write (Barbe, 1988). One reason for this is that if students are so concerned with spelling while they write, they will lose creativity in their writing. (Jenkins, 1997) It stands to reason that if the spelling curriculum were based on words they most commonly used in writing, students would not be as concerned with spelling as they wrote. They would be more familiar and comfortable with the words, and their creativity would benefit from this. Between 2,500 and 3,000 words make up about 96% of the words that people write. More specifically, the words “and”, “I”, and “the” account for 10% of the words used in print (Barbe, 1988). Another reason that spelling and writing must be connected is that writing reinforces spelling. “Strange words, even nonsense words, may be memorized by anyone for a short period, but unless words are used in writing, they are likely soon to slip beyond recall” (Henderson, 1990). This showed that in using the traditional spelling instruction, educators were telling students that it was acceptable to memorize a list of words until Friday, and then forget them.

Memory must play some part in spelling. This is simply because the English language does not follow its spelling rules at all times. Therefore, sometimes spelling has to be memorized. Can students memorize over fifty thousand words? (Henderson, 1990) This does not seem likely. Therefore, the curriculum must concentrate on the words that are most important for them to memorize. Memorization alone is not enough. Educators must recognize the need for memorization, but also move beyond it. “Traditional spelling instruction that involves the repetitious copying of words or the memorization of word lists does not promote active, reflective thought about language” (Birsh, 1999).

Research pointed to the fact that much of the student success in spelling depends on time spent at home. Spelling lessons were explained as, “...designed to fill about a fifteen - minute period in the teaching day, but most of the work is expected to be carried out by pupils independently” (Henderson, 1990). In the case of most students, that is not realistic. Many students do not get the academic support at home needed to achieve success in this model of spelling instruction.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Overview

This study tested the effects of a spiraling spelling curriculum on student retention and transference to daily writing. For one year the study group participated in weekly spelling tests and bi-annual dictation assessments. The purpose was to prove that this method was an effective alternative to the traditional method of teaching spelling.

Research Design

The idea for this study came from the fact that the school was so frustrated with the spelling curriculum. Teachers were also frustrated with students' writing. Students were misspelling words that were essential to good writing. Therefore, the school decided to create a new curriculum. The new curriculum was based on Lee Jenkins' research, and his "Data Not Guesswork" seminar. The idea was that students would be responsible for a larger list of words for the entire year. It began in kindergarten. The kindergarten students were given a list of 25 words at the beginning of the year. When they reached first grade, they kept their kindergarten words, and were given 25 more words for first grade. This list continued to grow until they had 450 words in fifth grade. Every week a spelling test was given. It was decided that the number of words on each test would depend on the size of the list. The spelling committee took the square root of the number of words on the list and this was the number of words to be given on each test. This curriculum did not mean that instruction would be ignored. Each teacher was able to teach spelling in any manner that they felt worked best for him or her. The spelling patterns were still taught, along with phonemic spelling, but at the teacher's discretion. Teachers could look back at words missed, and look for a pattern to find a place to focus their instruction.

When using the traditional method of teaching spelling, it was found to be ineffective at best, and detrimental at times. Students were bored with the rote memorization part of spelling. They also saw that the words had no connection to their life whatsoever. Students had no motivation to look at their words. The boredom caused resentment toward spelling. For a while some classroom teachers attempted to pull words from the Science, Social Studies, Math, and Health curriculums. This helped the interest a little, but when the students looked at some of the hard words, they felt like they were intentionally being tricked. It seemed to them that they were being set up to fail. That is why a computer program was developed by Tom Backus to randomly select the words for each test. Each week a different student sat at the computer during the test. This student used the program designed and written by Tom Backus to randomly generate the words. The program put a number between 1 and 450 up on the monitor each time the student hit the enter key. The student read out the number to the teacher, and the teacher looked on their numbered list and read the word that corresponded with it. Each student had this same list to study from, so they knew that they were not being tricked. The students generated the words, and they have the same list as the teacher did.

In general, about one hour a week was spent on spelling instruction. On Mondays, the students got back their tests and used a designed sheet to work on the words they missed. This sheet came from Dan Hoefs, and was based on research he found during his Master's Program from the University of Minnesota. On Wednesdays

the class was taught a spelling pattern or they focused on some words that had come up as problem words from previous lists. This instruction also took about half an hour.

Subjects

A fifth grade class, consisting of 19 students was used for this study. This class was chosen for this study for numerous reasons. One reason is familiarity. Being familiar with the class allowed more time to focus on the study itself without having to take time to learn a different class. Another reason is that these students had taken part in the program as fourth graders. This meant that they would be familiar with the K-4 list, which is the idea of the program.

Instruments and Measuring Devices

The original idea came from Lee Jenkins, so it was decided to look to him to see how to best evaluate the program. Fortunately his model led directly to the Continuous Improvement model used by the Rochester School District. Jenkins recommended using scatter diagrams, student run charts, and class average charts to visually show improvement over time. This would show the effectiveness for their actual spelling tests. Transference into daily writing however, was another matter. This proved more challenging. It was decided to use a standard writing sample taken twice a year as the data. Each member of the spelling committee randomly chose words from their grade specific list, using the computer program, to include in a paragraph. Then, that committee member wrote a paragraph with those words to dictate to each class. This dictation was only given in the first and fourth quarters. They were graded only on the words that came from the list. This list included words from the kindergarten up through their current grade level lists. Lee Jenkins recommended using the square root when determining how many words to use in assessment. For example, the fifth grade list had a total of 450 words. Out of those words, 300 of them were on the K-4 list. This left 150 new words for fifth graders. The square root of 150 is approximately 12, so 12 words out of the dictation paragraph had to be from the fifth grade list. These paragraphs were scored and checked for progress from each student. The idea of this program was not to see everybody at the 100% mark as soon as possible. The idea was to see improvement and transference into daily writing.

Validity Measures

Measuring a student's ability to transfer spelling into daily writing using the dictation piece should be a consistent measure. This is because each student was given the same piece. Using random samplings of daily writing would not have been accurate because students would use a different number of words from the list in their writing. This way, each student assessment was identical.

Reliability Measures

Each teacher could teach spelling in a different way throughout the week. So, each teacher may get different results using this test. However, in this study, only one hour of instruction per week was spent on spelling. This was a minimal amount. Therefore if this test were repeated using more instruction, it could be expected to see the scores to increase.

Procedures

The procedure for assessment of transference to daily writing was very uniform. The teacher repeated each sentence 4 times, breaking it into manageable chunks for the students to remember. All students were given a cover sheet to use to discourage any copying of other students' work. The first assessment, or the baseline was given the eighth week of school. This is one week before a three week break. The final assessment was given the eighth week of the final quarter. This is also one week before their summer break.

Conclusion

The results showed an increase in retention and transference into daily writing by every student in the class

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

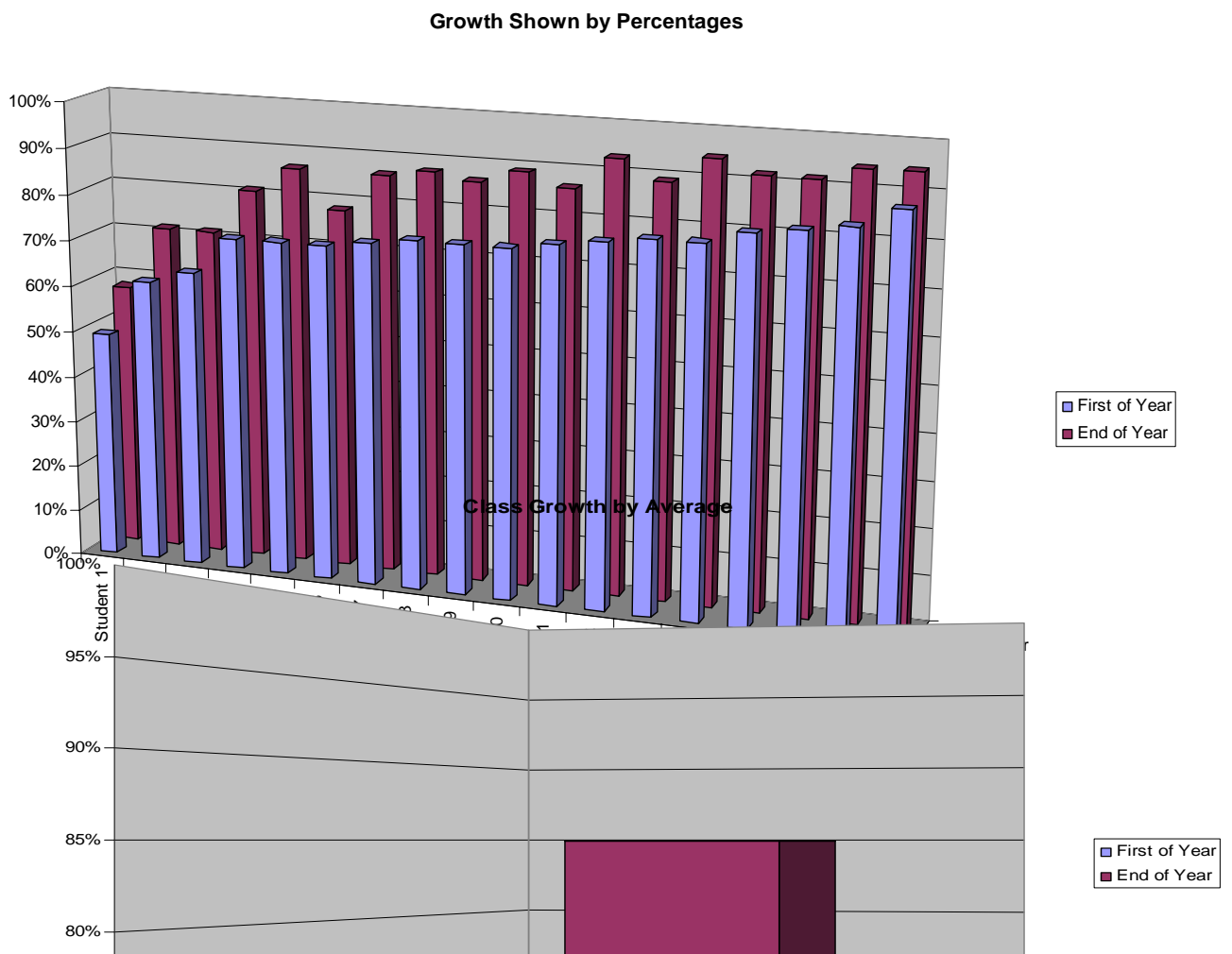
Every student in this class showed improvement in their spelling in daily writing. The amount of success and growth varied as would be expected when considering the varied ability levels, and learning challenges present in this class. When considering the number of words correct on the dictation piece, one student gained only four words throughout the year. However, this student began the year by missing only seven words. The largest jump shown was ten words (see figure 1). As a class there was a growth of ten percent from the beginning of the year to the end of the year see figure (see figures 2 and 3). At the end of the year, the class averaged getting 85% of the words correct on the dictation. The level of accountability in this study is exactly what a teacher should strive for. Students should be held accountable for what they have learned. When a program lets students know that they will be expected to remember what they have learned, the students will rise to the occasion.

When disaggregating the data, no link was found between improvement and any particular group of students. The ESOL students showed approximately the same growth as the native speakers. The student with the anxiety disorder showed small growth. This could have been related to this person's propensity to perform poorly on tests.

It would be interesting to see the results if the dictation piece was given quarterly. In order for this to be valid, the dictation piece would have to be different every quarter. The words from the list used should remain the same, but the sentences should be changed. This should nullify the possibility of students memorizing part of the dictation. If done this way, one could study trends throughout the year.

Student number	# of words correct on first test	# of words correct on final test
Student 1	36	42
Student 2	45	52
Student 3	47	52
Student 4	53	57
Student 5	53	59
Student 6	53	63
Student 7	54	63
Student 8	55	63
Student 9	55	63
Student 10	55	64
Student 11	56	65
Student 12	57	65
Student 13	58	67
Student 14	58	67
Student 15	60	68
Student 16	61	69
Student 17	62	69
Student 18	65	69

Figure 2: Individual Growth by Percentage



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Spelling has long been seen as a difficult subject to teach with any meaning. Rote memorization is a part of education's past, not its future. Every effort must be made to make spelling relevant, easy to teach, and (Dare it be said?) fun! Spelling instruction needs to become based on research just like everything else that is taught. Research proves that students learn best when learning is relevant. Spelling has always been on the outside when it comes to relevancy. This method of teaching spelling makes it very relevant to the students. They are involved in the testing process. When students are actively engaged, they will learn more.

This was a successful study. Each student tested showed growth. The class as a whole showed a large growth at the end of the study. When the information was calculated using a student's T-test the probability, assuming the null hypothesis was 0.003. This is a statistically significant number.

Recommendations

Any school, at any grade level, can use this curriculum. It is a very flexible curriculum. This is part of its appeal. This curriculum can be adjusted to fit any school's needs. Teachers in the building who know the needs of their students best can generate the lists for each school. The students and teachers alike enjoy using this method of teaching spelling.

It is difficult to convince some students and parents that this new program is the best way to approach spelling. Many students make very good scores using the traditional method. There are a good number of students who if given a list on Monday will memorize it by Friday, and make high scores. The point that needs to be made is

that high scores don't necessarily always mean a high level of learning is occurring.

There were some parents who were a little upset when their children, who usually didn't miss a word, suddenly were only getting 15 out of 21 correct. These parents need to be assured that it is not raw scores that are important. It is the presence of growth that is key. That is why scores are not reported at percentages. They are reported as the number of words correct. This is a clear way to show growth over the year. It is vital to make parents understand the accountability and the transference into daily writing. Once parents understand the premise behind the program they tend to back it.

The curriculum has many benefits to it. It has been proven to be good for the students. Teachers enjoy using it. It energizes a subject that is in sore need of a complete overhaul.

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WILL IMPLEMENTING A READING FLUENCY PROGRAM BASED ON CURRENT
RESEARCH INCREASE MY STUDENTS' FLUENCY AND READING COMPREHENSION?

by

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B.A. University of Northern Iowa, 1993

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Department of Education

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This capstone entitled:

Will Implementing a Reading Fluency Program Based on Current Research
Increase My Students' Fluency and Reading Comprehension?

Written by Jodi Fisher

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The final copy of the capstone has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

Fisher, Jodi (B.A., Education)

Will Implementing a Reading Fluency Program Based on Current Research Increase My Students' Fluency and Reading Comprehension?

Capstone directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman

Abstract

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately, correctly, and with expression. Using research-based teaching techniques in the classroom is at the core of effective teaching. Research on reading fluency is beginning to make a correlation between a student's reading fluency and reading comprehension, the higher the fluency the better the comprehension. This study put into place a reading fluency program that allowed students to practice their fluency with another student partner each day at their reading level. Each child also participated in weekly performance readings. Each week the performance readings were alternated with a poem of their choice or participating in a Reader's Theatre with the rest of the class. The performances were performed for each other and many times for other students or adults.

The student's current fluency and reading comprehension level was assessed and students were paired with a partner that matched reading and fluency levels as closely as possible. Each day the students read a passage to each other and recorded the correct words per minute (cwpm) on a line graph. The students read the same passage for five days and then started a new one the following Monday. Also during fluency practice the students worked on a poem or Reader's Theatre on alternating weeks. The intervention lasted for about three months, January 2004 until March 2004. At the end of the study the students were evaluated using the same testing measures they were pre-tested with, specifically looking for increased reading fluency and an increase in reading comprehension. After the assessment results were studied all students' fluency rates increased and there was an increase in comprehension as measured on the ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) standardized assessment for the majority of the students in the study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
	Need for the Study.....	1
	Statement of the Problem.....	2
	Statement of the Hypothesis.....	2
	Definition of Terms.....	2
	Variables.....	3
	Independent.....	3
	Dependent.....	3
	Control.....	3
	Limitations of the Study.....	3
II.	REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	5
III.	METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	9
	Overview.....	9
	Research Design.....	9
	Subjects.....	10
	Instruments/Measuring Devices.....	10
	Validity Measures.....	11
	Reliability Measures.....	11
	Procedures.....	12
	Conclusion.....	12
IV.	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	14
V.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	17
	Recommendations.....	17
VI.	REFERENCES.....	18

INTRODUCTION

Many classroom teachers struggle each year as they work to teach their students to become good readers. What is a good reader? Is it a student that can understand and discuss what was just read or a student that can read easily and fluently? There are so many facets of being a good reader, such as phonics skills, vocabulary understanding, text comprehension, and also fluency. The Rochester Public School District became focused on assessing and increasing students reading fluency. This idea was very intriguing and led to the question; does a fluent reader always have an easier time comprehending what was read? Teaching fluency was not something being specifically worked on during the school day, but if it was, could it help the struggling readers?

Need for the Study

The focus for educators is to produce literate students. There are many theories and techniques used today; educators need to decide which are most important. Some of the theories range from whole language vs. phonics instruction, phonemic awareness, comprehension, guided reading and the list goes on. Fluency was not something that was intentionally worked on with the students in this classroom. Instruction seemed to be successful while focusing on phonics, phonemic awareness, guided reading, and comprehension strategies. Fluency was not an area previously researched or looked at closely for use within this classroom. Reading is worked on each day using a basal reading series and leveled books for guided reading. Still, many students struggle with comprehension and fluency. Four students in the class are really struggling with reading this school year. By coincidence, or not, their fluency rates are also very low. This information led to adding fluency practice to the daily reading instruction to increase comprehension and reading fluency. Will adding new fluency focused techniques help the students become better readers? Hopefully, it will add another dimension to the reading instruction and become a strategy that will continue to be used in the future.

Statement of the Problem

Several students are struggling with reading and it is not clear why. Many areas of reading instruction have been tried, but improved reading skills still have not followed. As a teacher searching for a way to help struggling readers, it was important to look at the latest research and try some new techniques with the students. After reading many studies and articles dealing with the importance of fluency, it became obvious that fluency is an important piece of reading instruction that students and teachers have not been purposefully practicing or assessing. Based on current research studies, I believe students should make gains in their fluency and reading comprehension after practicing fluency over time.

Statement of the Hypothesis

Will implementing a reading fluency program based on current research increase my students' fluency and reading comprehension?

Definition of Terms

Fluency: the ability to read a text accurately and quickly.

Comprehension: understanding what was read or read to you.

Reader's theatre: similar to a play, students have characters that they speak for, but they do not act out the story with props. They read it orally and share the story through their voices and the words.

Repeated reading: students are provided with a passage at their reading level and are provided time to read it many times orally.

Independent reading level: relatively easy text for a reader, no more than 1 in 20 words that are difficult for the reader (95% success).

Instructional reading level: challenging, but manageable text for the reader, no more than 1 in 10 words that are difficult for the reader (90% success).

Frustration reading level: difficult text for the reader, with more than 1 in 10 words that are difficult for the reader.

Fluency assessment: a student reads a passage orally for one minute to determine the number of words correct in a minute.

Decoding: using letter sounds and chunks of letter sounds in words to read an unfamiliar word.

Performance reading: stories, poems, scripts that are read or performed aloud.

Variables

Independent variables.

The students in this study are fourth grade students that range in age from nine years old to ten years old. The students come from many different backgrounds, ethnic and financial.

Longfellow Elementary School is a school-wide Title I school, which means that about 75% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. Many students move in and out of the school because their families are migrant workers and are only in Minnesota during parts of the school year. Many times when students leave they do not attend school. Five students have been identified with learning disabilities or emotional/behavioral disorders. There are also four children that are taking medication for ADD/ADHD. The number of absences of the students is also something that cannot be controlled. Some students may receive outside help with reading during the after school program or with reading specialists in the building.

Dependent variables.

The object of the study is to increase the reading fluency rate of each student through passage practice and performance readings.

Control variables.

The study will be done in the same classroom each day at the same elementary school. All students in the classroom will participate. The students will practice each day after lunch recess and each of them will have the same partner during the whole study. The classroom teacher will be the only adult to instruct and work with the kids during the daily practice and during performed readings. The classroom teacher will also choose the passages that each student will practice each week.

Limitations of the Study

The study was restricted to a school district in Minnesota and a classroom with 19 students. The study will need to be completed during the school day because many of the students cannot be relied upon to practice at home. Many of the students do not have the support and help at home needed to practice their passages each night. To ensure that the students are practicing, the activities will be done during the school day. This study will include data for each of the children in the class.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading instruction has been an educational topic of debate for years. What is the best way to teach reading for all students? With the implementation of The No Child Left Behind Act, teachers are being asked to only use research based teaching practices within their classrooms. The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) published a document that describes the findings from the report of the National Reading Panel. Specifically, it introduces and discusses the building blocks for teaching children to read. One of the building blocks is fluency. Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly (Ambruster and Osborn, 2001).

“Fluent readers can recognize words automatically. They are able to group words quickly to help them understand what they read. When fluent readers read aloud, they read smoothly and with expression. Their reading sounds natural, like speech. Readers who are not yet fluent read slowly, word by word” (p.9).

Fluency has long been an integral part of reading instruction. Looking back in history, you will find that oral reading practice in the classroom had a prominent place in American education. From the earliest days of the United States through the first decade of the twentieth century, oral reading dominated school instruction (Rasinski, 2003). Oral reading was important for instruction because it was the way that families shared information with each other and reading aloud to each other was also a form of entertainment (Rasinski, 2003). Near the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century oral reading as a teaching technique began to disappear (2003). As reading materials and modes of sharing information increased, the need for oral reading skills declined and silent reading began to replace oral reading as the focus of reading instruction (Rasinski, 2003). Silent reading was felt to be more suitable for the way readers were using their reading skills. More focus needed to be put on silent reading and understanding of text, comprehension (2003).

Soon after, round robin reading was introduced into American classrooms (2003). Round robin is a technique where a teacher calls on a student to read orally without any practice of the text that is being read. Students were expected to follow along silently while another student read aloud.

This technique can make life easier for a teacher because the group is controlled and a small amount of assessment can be done on each reader. However, it can be difficult for the children because the child's reading skills are on display for the rest of the class. For some students, oral reading can be very challenging when it is not practiced before hand (Rasinski, 2003). Round robin reading is still widespread today, but research is showing that high quality forms of oral reading should be used instead to increase fluency (2003).

Reading fluency has been called the missing ingredient in many reading programs (Allington, 1983). The National Reading Panel (2000) reported that fluency should be a key component of reading instruction. A student's lack of fluency leads to poor comprehension (Rasinski, 2003). Fluent readers can decode words without much effort, which leads the way to understanding what was read or comprehending the text. Rasinski explains that there are four ways to build reading fluency, model good oral reading, provide oral support for readers, offer plenty of practice opportunities, and encourage fluency through paraphrasing (2003). Although oral reading and support for readers is happening in the classroom, the focus of this research will be in the area of offering plenty of practice opportunities. Many of the ways to build fluency Rasinski refers to are overlapping. The area of repeated practice is one that is indeed measurable and intentional.

Two areas of focus for offering practice include repeated readings and performance readings. Having plenty of practice opportunities enables students to read over and over again. As with any skill, such as cooking or sports, practice is the way to improve.

Practice through repeated readings is a way to improve students decoding skills, which is essential for success and increased reading fluency and comprehension (Rasinski, 2003). Becoming fluent in reading would enable students to focus on the meaning of the text and not on the sounds of the letters. In *The Fluent Reader*, Rasinski refers to several studies that confirm the power of repeated readings as an instructional tool. Sarah Donhower (1989) identified several proven benefits of the method, such as "results in improved story comprehension." Pairing students together for a cooperative repeated reading can be effective in improving reading fluency (Adams and Brown, 2004). Students are matched up by reading abilities. In about 6 minutes they each read their passage to their partner for a minute and then record the correct words per minute on a line graph. They work on one passage each week and then try a new one as their fluency increases (2004). This

practice is different from word flash cards, which is commonly used to increase sight word recognition, because students are not focusing on individual words, but on phrasing and meaning of the text (Rasinski, 2003).

Another form of repeated practice includes performance readings.

“Performance reading is a powerful instructional tool because it requires students to use repeated reading in preparation for their performance, and to read for meaning and understanding before and during their performances” (p.105).

There are several types; the most effective types of performance readings are student-led read aloud, reader’s theatre, and poetry readings (2003).

For this study, poetry reading and reader’s theatre were incorporated to the daily work of repeated reading of passages for each student. Every other week a poem would be selected by each student, practiced all week, and performed for the class on Fridays. Poems are written to be read aloud, a student’s voice and way of reading carries an interpretation of the poem (Rasinski, 2003). Poetry is fun to read because of the rhyme, rhythm, and repetition. These attributes also help to build a student’s fluency (2003).

Reader’s theatre will be incorporated during the weeks opposite of poetry performance. Reader’s theatre is not a play; it is like reading a script as a particular character (Rasinski, 2003). Students stand in front of the class and read from their script. There is no need to memorize lines, wear costumes, or create scenery. “The performers only have one attribute, their voices. In order to use their voices well, they must practice the text beforehand” (Rasinski, 2003). Many children are motivated through engaging activities with their peers, such as reader’s theatre. Scripts with smaller individual parts seem much less overwhelming to struggling readers if they do not have to be memorized and performed like a play (Chard and Tyler, 2000). Because of the need for practice for an upcoming performance, reader’s theatre lends itself nicely into the area of repeated readings. The celebration is performing successfully for others and realizing the increased fluency gained by practice. Reader’s theatre scripts can be created based on a story or picture book. There are also many websites that can provide good scripts for students to work with.

As research shows, there are many high quality ways to practice fluency (Rasinski, 2003). The focus of this study is on the intentional daily repeated reading of grade level appropriate passages and the incorporation of performance readings, such as poetry and reader's theatre. Based on research, using repeated readings and performance readings student's fluency should increase, thus increasing their reading comprehension. As Rasinski's research reveals, repeated readings will lead to improved fluency and comprehension (2003).

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Overview

Referring to the current research on reading fluency, there were two strategies repeatedly mentioned that have been used to increase students fluency and comprehension, repeated readings and performance readings. It is thought that these two strategies, used consistently with students, would increase both reading fluency and comprehension. That current research and the book The Six-Minute Solution: A Reading Fluency Program by Gail Adams, M.Ed. and Sheron Brown, M.A., M.S. were used as the basis for fluency practice each day. The students also used performance readings, poetry and readers theatre, to practice fluency each week based on the work of Dr. Timothy Rasinski.

Research Design

The goal of the study was to set up a way for the students to practice reading passages at their level, but a wide range of leveled passages was needed. The Rochester school district offered a Professional Growth Academy class on fluency. The evening of the class the instructor shared a book called The Six-Minute Solution: A Reading Fluency Program by Gail Adams, M.Ed. and Sheron Brown, M.A., M.S. This book had a well thought out plan already put together. The book contained the assessments needed to put students with a reading partner for repeated readings and it also provided the passages and recording charts for the students to use each day. The only piece that was missing was the information for performance readings. Referring to Timothy V. Rasinski's book, The Fluent Reader, many ideas for planning student activities to practice fluency through performance reading were discovered. Rasinski provided research, web-sites, and other ideas as resources for performance reading practice. This class was full of performers and practicing fluency through poetry and reader's theatre was motivating to them. The poems and reader's theatre scripts require the students to practice all week, perfecting their fluency, and then perform for an audience on Friday. For twenty minutes each day the students had repeated reading practice, following the Six-Minute Solution book. Also, once a week the students had either reader's theatre or a poem to practice for performance readings. Each week was alternated with a poem or a reader's theatre script. The students picked a poem on Monday and practiced, at home and at school, all week. On

Friday each student read the poem to the rest of the class or visitors from another classroom. The same procedure was also used for reader's theatre, except the classroom teacher selected the script. The students still have some choice by choosing the character they would like to read.

Subjects

Nineteen fourth grade students participated, which consisted of 10 boys and 9 girls from Rochester, Minnesota. Students represented several ethnic groups- Somalian, Hispanic, with the majority of the students being Caucasian from middle to lower socioeconomic classes. Four of the nineteen students are English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students, two students have learning disabilities in reading, and two students receive services for emotional/behavioral disorders. Also, seven of the students have an independent reading level at or above grade level. All students in the class participated in the study for several reasons. When the data is analyzed, it will be beneficial to see not only how it worked for the struggling readers, but also if the fluency and comprehension of the higher readers improved. It is also important for the unity of the class to do this together and not exclude anyone.

Instruments/Measuring Devices

The Six-Minute Solution included record keeping sheets for the students and leveled passages ranging from grade 1 to grade 8. It provided assessments to use with the students. Two assessments were used for this study, oral fluency rates (correct words per minute) on a passage at their grade-level selected by the Rochester Public School District and the San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading Ability. The combination of assessments was used to determine each student's instructional reading level. The San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading Ability is a sight word reading test included in The Six-Minute Solution that quickly determines a student's grade level reading ability. The students also took the ITBS in the fall and the spring of the school year the study was completed in. It was not possible to administer the ITBS right after the study was finished. It was required to be taken with the rest of the Rochester students at a later date.

The Rochester School district provides each classroom teacher with a passage for the students to read out loud to the teacher while their fluency rate is being assessed. Those assessments were also used with each student. There are four different passages used throughout

the school year. Only two of the passages were used during this study, one as a pre-test and one as a post-test.

Validity Measures

The validity of the assessments should be consistent because only reading fluency will be tested. The students found the cwpm each day on their repeated reading passages with their partners. The district fluency assessment, which is the pre and post-test of this study, was done in the same way. Each student read the passage aloud and the correct words per minute were calculated. The only difference was that the district fluency assessment was read with the teacher instead of student partners. The other assessment used was the ITBS. This is a standardized test given individually to each student in the classroom setting. The student's comprehension was evaluated from the scores on the ITBS to see if there was an improvement in their reading comprehension, not just their reading fluency after the interventions in the study were complete.

Reliability Measures

Two different forms of assessment were used to increase the reliability of the study. A district fluency assessment that consists of a passage at a fourth grade reading level for each student to read aloud to the classroom teacher was used. The classroom teacher kept track of any miscues and calculated the number of words each student read correctly in a minute. The assessment was given the same way before the intervention started and again after the intervention was complete. Another assessment that was completed was the ITBS for fourth grade students. Each student took the standardized assessment in the fall before the study began and again in the spring after the study was complete. Each student's scores in the area of reading were studied to locate an increase in reading skills and/or comprehension. By having more than one source of data the research increases its reliability.

Procedures

After the initial assessments were completed, students were paired together based on their cwpm score and their instructional reading level (see figure 1). To make a successful partnership,

Figure 1

Initial Assessment Record

Student Name	District Fluency Assessment Dec. 2003 (wcpm)	San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading Ability
Roberto		
Trevor	21	1
Fred	22	3
Alec	29	3
Cristina	49	3
CJ	62	4
Josh	65	5
Andrew	89	5
Muna	92	5
Lili	99	5
Tiffany	118	5
Manuel	119	5
Meekaala	125	5
Rebecca	118	6
Mackenzie	120	6
Logan	120	6
Kayla	150	6
Josue	115	7
Sam	119	7

the students needed to be reading at the same instructional grade level and be within ten words of each other on the oral fluency rate. Any outlying students could be paired up with an adult volunteer, paraprofessional, or classroom teacher. There was one such student and he was paired with the classroom teacher.

To begin the study, the students were paired with their fluency partner and they practiced the procedure for a repeated reading. They were trained on how to mark errors on a passage as their partner read. They learned how to count the total number of words read and then subtract the number of errors to get their partner's total number of words read correctly in a minute. Students received instruction in appropriate partner behavior, such as whisper reading and how to provide feedback to their partners. This procedure was modeled and practiced for several days. Soon after, students were able to record and interact appropriately with their partner on their own. Each day, the partners got their folders that contained two copies of a passage in a plastic sleeve, an overhead marker, a small damp sponge, and their record sheets. The fluency partnerships consisted of partner 1 and partner 2. Partner 1 was a little stronger reader (the students don't know that) and they read first to model for partner 2. The timer was set for a minute and partner 1 read out loud while partner 2 recorded miscues. At the end of one minute, the number of words correct per minute was determined by taking the total number of words read and subtracting the number of errors. Partner 1 then records their score on a line graph. The same procedure was followed for partner 2. The same passage was used for five days and then a new passage was chosen at their instructional reading level. The students returned their supplies and began to practice their poem of the week or their reader's theatre script. The entire practice time took about twenty minutes and became less, as students gained proficiency at the procedure. On each Friday during the study the students performed a poem or reader's theatre script to a group of students from another classroom or to each other. Family members and adults from the building were invited in to listen to us perform.

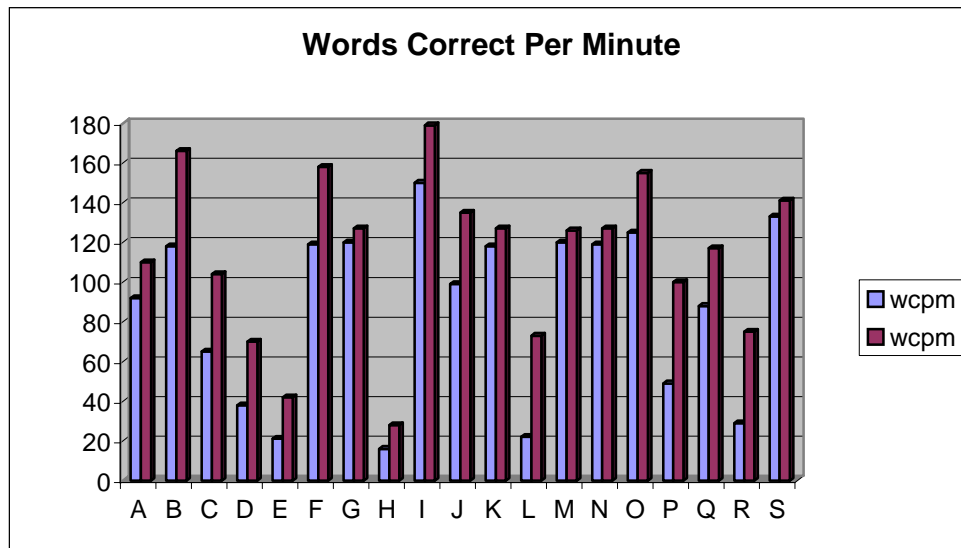
Conclusion

The fluency and reading comprehension of the students in this study increased after the interventions were complete. The wcpm increased for most of the students. In addition, the spring 2004 Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores in reading comprehension improved when compared to the fall 2003 ITBS scores. The ITBS is a standardized assessment that tests a student's ability in reading, language arts, and mathematics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

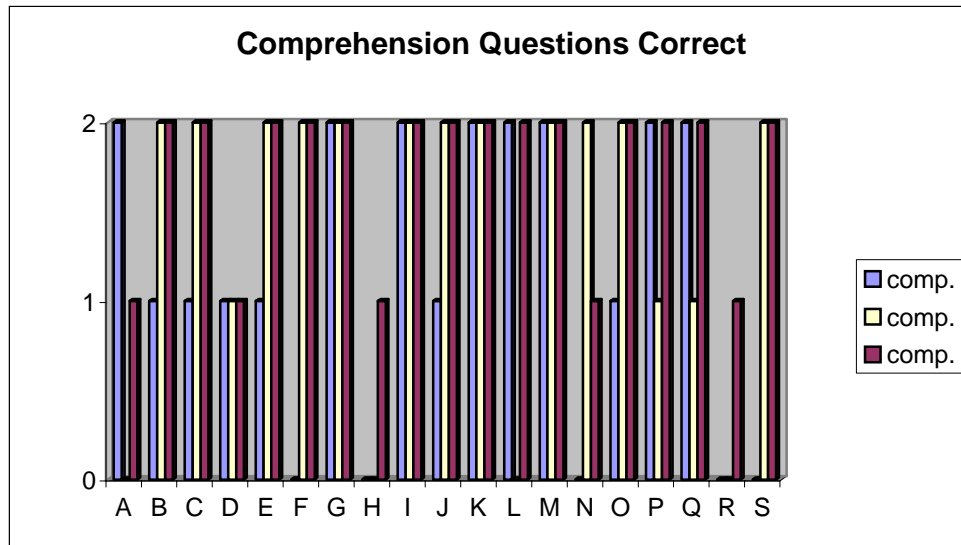
The classroom of students that participated in this study had a wide range of reading abilities, and all of them made some type of progress on the assessments after the study was completed. If only looking at the number of words each student read correct in a minute on a fourth grade passage, each student made progress (see figure 2). There was a wide range of increases in the

Figure 2



number of words correct in a minute. When referring to figure 2, the wcpm in blue is the pre-test score and the purple is the post-test wcpm. For example, student E had 21 wcpm on the pre-test in December and on the post-test in March that same student read 42 wcpm. Other students made smaller gains, for example 120 wcpm on the pre-test and 126 wcpm on the post-test. Overall, every student in the study increased the wcpm after participating in repeated readings and performance readings. The other area on the pre and post-test of interest was reading comprehension. After each student read the test passages, they were asked to answer two comprehension questions. Most of the students maintained or increased the number of questions answered correctly, but there were four students who did not answer any questions correctly on the post-test. After the study was complete the same set of students read another minute passage in May. No students scored a zero on the reading comprehension questions and they all maintained the number of wcpm (see figure 3).

Figure 3



The students in the study took the ITBS in August 2003 and again in April 2004. The student's standard score in reading and grade equivalent in reading was compared. A standard score is a number that describes the student's location on an achievement continuum. The scale is used to show progress from one year to the next. A grade equivalent is also a number that describes the student's location on an achievement continuum. It is a decimal number that shows performance in terms of grade level and months.

This information was compared (see figure 4 and figure 5) and found that most students made significant gains on reading scores in both the standard score and the grade equivalent.

Figure 4

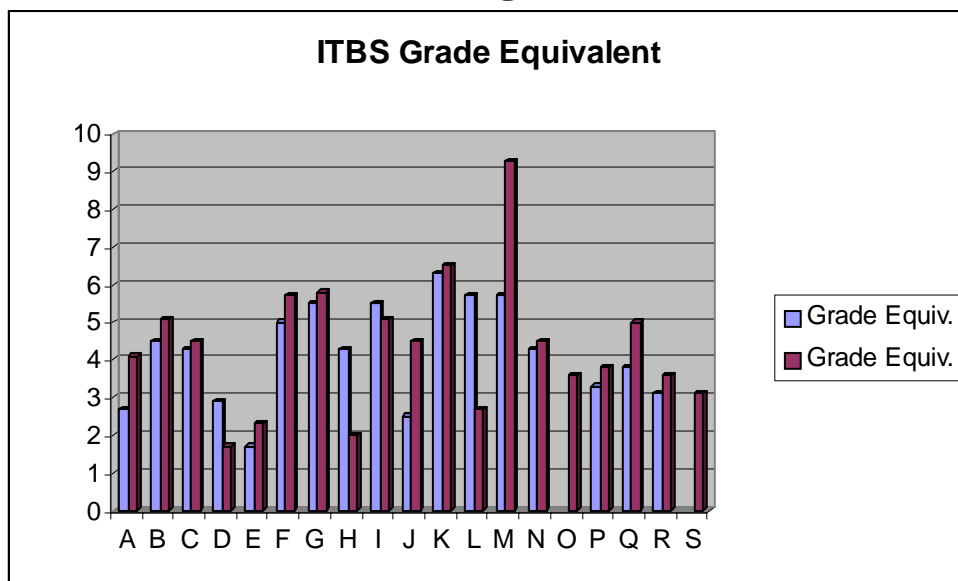
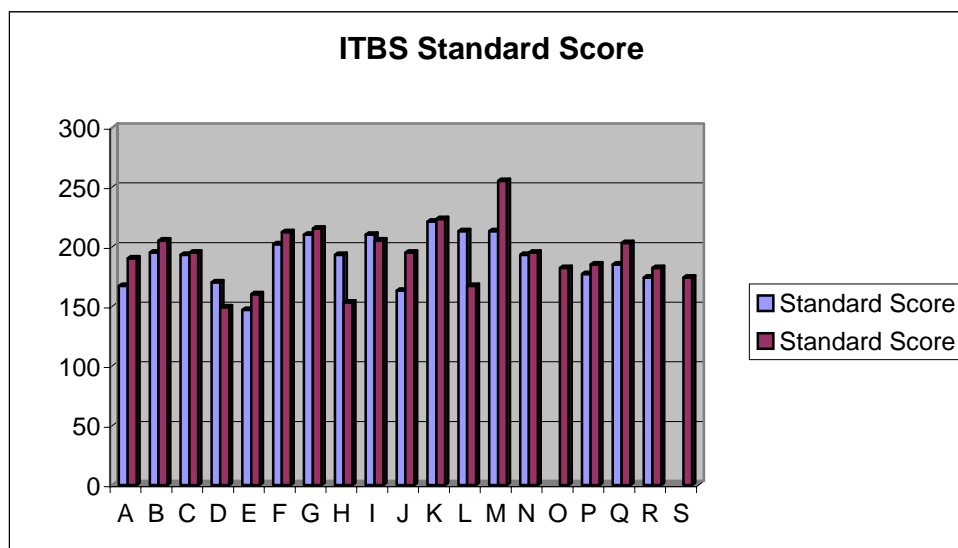


Figure 5



The average cwpm on the pre-test was 86 words. the average on the post-test was 114 cwpm. This was a 32% average increase in the cwpm for the students in the study. The average pre-test standard score and grade equivalent average was not as large, but there was a small increase in each area.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Nineteen fourth grade students of all reading ability levels participated in this study. Each student's current fluency and reading comprehension level was assessed and students were paired with a partner who matched reading and fluency levels as closely as possible. Each day the students read a passage to each other and recorded the cwpm on a graph. The students also practiced a poem or reader's theatre on alternating weeks during the study. Each Friday they performed a poem or a reader's theatre. The intervention lasted about three months. The students were very enthusiastic about repeated and performance readings. The students got excited each day while recording their cwpm score because they saw it increases the more they practiced. Performance readings were a highlight for the students. They begged to continue reader's theatre after the study was finished. They thoroughly enjoyed reading and sharing reader's theatre with other students and adults at Longfellow. Students frequently asked to turn stories they were independently reading into a reader's theatre the class could perform. At the end of the study the student's were evaluated using the same testing measures they were pre-tested with, specifically looking for increased reading fluency and an increase in reading comprehension. After the results were studied, student fluency rates increased and there was an increase in comprehension as measured on the ITBS standardized test for the majority of the students in the study. It is possible that the increase in scores occurred because of increased maturity and ability of the students and may have increased without the completion of this study.

Recommendations

The interventions used to practice fluency with students could be used in any classroom and have similar results. The combination of repeated readings and performance readings led to an increase in student's reading fluency and comprehension. One area that could be examined further is if the type of passage, fiction or non-fiction, affects the cwpm of students. The Rochester District used a passage of each type to assess students. It is possible that students could score better on a fiction or non-fiction passage. It is recommended that fluency be viewed as an essential ingredient in teaching reading to students.

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WILL EXPOSING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
TO CHILDREN'S LITERATURE INCREASE READING LEVELS?

by

Colleen Heppding

A capstone submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Winona State

University

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This capstone entitled:

Will Exposing English Language Learners to Children's Literature Increase Reading Levels?

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Heppding, Colleen (M.S., Education)

Will exposing English Language Learners to children's literature increase reading levels?

Capstone directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman

Abstract

The number of English Language Learners is increasing in the schools of America and, we are seeing a wider gap in reading level abilities of these children compared to the native children. Children should be exposed to a variety of literature to peak interest levels and motivate desires with books, in order to read for personal enjoyment. This study included six first through third grade students. First, student reading levels were assessed using Running Reading Records. Secondly, the students participated in author studies. Students were introduced, once a week, to three children's authors during a six week period. Through these author studies the students learned personal information about the authors, read their books, and completed various activities. Lastly, student reading levels were assessed again and compared to initial reading levels. The initial reading levels and final reading levels were compared. The results showed four of the students' reading levels remained the same, while two students showed an increase in reading levels. The six students stated they enjoyed learning about the authors and reading their works.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER:

I.	Introduction.....	1
a.	Need for the Study.....	1
b.	Statement of the Problem.....	2
c.	Purpose of the Study.....	2
d.	Statement of the Hypotheses.....	3
e.	Definition of Terms.....	3
f.	Limitations and Delimitations of the Study.....	4
II.	Review of Related Literature.....	5
III.	Methods and Procedures.....	10
a.	Overview.....	10
b.	Design.....	12
c.	Selection of Subjects.....	12
d.	Validity Measures.....	13
e.	Reliability Measures.....	13
f.	Field Procedures.....	13
g.	Conclusion.....	14
IV.	Results and Discussion.....	15
a.	Procedures.....	15
b.	Variables.....	16
c.	Hypothesis Testing.....	16
V.	Summary and Conclusion.....	17
a.	Introduction.....	17
b.	Summary of Results.....	17
c.	Conclusions.....	17
d.	Recommendations.....	18

References.....	19
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Appendices:

Appendix A.....	21
Appendix B.....	22
Appendix C.....	23
Appendix D.....	24

Will exposing English Language Learners to children's literature increase reading levels?

CHAPTER ONE

Need for the Study:

The number of English Language Learners is increasing in the schools of America and, we are seeing a wider gap in the reading level abilities of these students compared to the native students. It is rare to find English Language Learners keeping up with the one year of academic content knowledge and language learning at the same time. Therefore, we are seeing these students falling further and further behind in reading levels compared to the native English speaking students. (Peregoy & Boyle 2001)

Many of us grew up listening to and enjoying a large number of stories. That is how we spent time entertaining ourselves before video games. These people were very lucky, indeed, to receive a rich heritage through oral storytelling. They learned culture and history, too.

Today's world has changed greatly. Young couples often set up households far from family and friends where better work opportunities are found. By starting a family so far from extended families, they lose access to a wonderful treasure: the stories and values family members teach. Therefore, whether in English or Spanish, reading is a treasure.

According to the 2000 NAEP Reading Report Card for the United States, 74% of students who are poor readers in the third grade will remain poor readers in the ninth grade. (Kolen 2000) There are a number of reasons for this problem according to this report. Some reasons include inadequate exposure to literacy conventions and

literacy instruction during early childhood. Transience which include migrant students, military dependents, and children of poverty who move frequently, disrupting education and making it difficult for them to obtain consistent, connected reading instruction. Immigrant students who enter American schools after the early childhood years may be lacking basic literacy in their own language, which negatively impacts acquisition of English language skills. Low parental education levels and/or lack of parental knowledge about how necessary it is to talk to children, read to children, and explain to children is also a contributor. Many of the participating students fall into these categories stated above, so the school needed to find a way to get the students interested and motivated in reading to themselves, therefore, hopefully increasing reading levels.

Statement of the Problem:

Because many English Language Learners' lives are not involved with books at home, they are showing little motivation and interest in reading children's literature. A lack of interest in literature leads to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, ultimately leading to a lack of desire to read. Consequently this, results in low reading abilities. Low performance in the English Language Learner classroom coupled with reading difficulty in the mainstreamed classes led to the need to change the way the students were approaching reading.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this action research project was to raise Plainview's English Language Learners reading levels and increase awareness of cultural literary. The researcher will increase the English Language Learners exposure to popular

children's literature. The goal was to motivate the students to want to read and increase excitement and enthusiasm for literature, so they would practice reading independently and, thus, increase reading level abilities and fluency. Many of the students viewed reading as a chore. The students viewed reading as something that had to be done because it was assigned, not rather than a fun activity that you could be done on its own. By sparking the students' interest with authors, they will become intrigued by books and start to explore them on their own.

Statement of the Hypotheses:

Students' reading levels will increase with exposure to children's literature.

Definition of Terms:

1. English Language Learners (ELL)- Students whose first language learned is not English.
2. Reading Level-The independent or instructional reading level of a student. A reading level is usually leveled by grade level (1.3) or by book level (A-Z)
3. Literacy- Encompasses communication through reading, writing, speaking and listening. The four are interrelated, so development in one impacts development in the other three.
4. Running Reading Records- A form of reading assessment which allows for observation and recording of what reading strategies a student is using during comprehension and fluency.
5. Reading Comprehension-Involves not only the reading of written symbols, but interpreting words in proper context, recalling word meaning, and assigning

meaning to words and phrases in such a way as to understand them.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study:

There are a number of factors which influenced the validity of this research. Some of these factors include: interest of students, absences, the students exposure to literature outside of my classroom, and the amount of time the student read on his own.

Each student will have a different amount of interest in children's literature. Some of the students will naturally be more interested in listening to stories than others.

Students will be absent from class and miss activities which might affect the amount of books they are exposed to during the author study.

The amount of exposure to children's literature outside of the classroom is unknown. Classroom teachers and parents might expose the students to many books, where as other students might not have that experience.

Some of the students might read for a personal interest. Other students may never pick up a book to read for fun.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review:

Learning to read is one of the most important skills students accomplish in elementary school because it is the basis for further future academics. The ability to read has an impact on many parts of life. From reading a job application to finding the sports scores in the newspaper, reading skills are used with regularity. From the middle elementary years through the rest of their lives as students, children spend much time reading and learning information.

To support young students in developing literacy, high-quality literature, including narrative and expository work, are the core materials. They are used during literature-based instruction (Scharer 1992). This type of instruction, which has gained increased emphasis in research and practice, provides authentic learning experiences and activities by using literature to teach and foster literacy.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) students require ample opportunities to hear and use English in various purposeful, authentic contexts that encourage and facilitate communication, social interaction, and risk-taking in a low anxiety environment. Read alouds by teachers or peers, book talks, story telling, literature circles, book buddies, author studies, and other reading response activities allow LEP students opportunities to learn, speak, and write in the target language in a meaningful setting (Peregoy & Boyle 2001).

Bilingual students exposed to, and encouraged to read and share, a lot of illustrated story books are consistently found to learn the target language more

quickly. In this way, through books, students appear to learn the language incidentally and develop a positive attitude toward books (McCune 2002).

Reading Aloud Benefits:

Research has shown students who learn to read on their own generally have had an adult who has read to them repeatedly (Clark 1976). Being read to aloud has many positive influences on the students. Students who struggle to read need to see reading as something that can be fun and entertaining. Many times struggling readers see books as work and as too challenging. The more books a student can be positively introduced to, the more that child may see reading as a pleasurable event. Reading aloud stimulates the appetite for good stories. It exposes students to literature they would not be able to read themselves. It shows them what real readers do and gives them a goal for learning to read. (Cullinan 1987)

Holdaway (1979) developed the shared reading model. It builds from the research which indicates storybook reading is a critically important factor in young children's reading development. The storybook reading done by parents in a home setting is particularly effective. However, in school, in most cases, a teacher reads to a group of students rather than to a single student. The shared reading model allows a group of students to experience many of the benefits that are part of storybook reading done for one or two students at home.

Cullinan (1987) stated she believes literacy can be promoted by developing children's joy in stories and by instilling in youngsters an early love of literature through positive contact with books.

Developing Vocabulary:

Faltis (1989) summarizes the advantages of using storybooks for language minority students. First, storybooks are an excellent source of both vocabulary and concept developments. The words tend to be presented in context for verbal interaction, particularly the important sequence of elicitation, response, and evaluation. Second, storybooks teach students about attitudes and behaviors which are valued in society.

Quality literature presents a multitude of discussion topics- from the literal to those that transcend the story. As McConaghy (1990), has pointed out, they allow students to link the story to their own lives, at times making sophisticated generalizations. Stories contain predictable, repetitive patterns that reinforce vocabulary and structures, provide relevant themes for young learners, and they are often highly generative (Gianelli 1991).

Many educators believe the single most effective way to promote vocabulary growth among students is to encourage reading (Routman 1991). Routman believes read alouds, guided reading, and independent reading all play an important role in the development of vocabulary. As McKenna, Robinson, and Wedman (1996) maintain, "Repeated encounters with a word, in oral and written language, provide experiences with and clues to the word's meaning that accrue over time..." (p. 271). As such, Jenkins, Stein and Wysocki (1984) designed a study to determine the relationship between reading and vocabulary development among fifth graders of varying ability levels. They found frequent presentation of targeted vocabulary words in supportive context increased word learning. Furthermore, they found informal prior exposure to

targeted vocabulary words resulted in greater learning. These findings were significant for students of varying ability levels.

Oral Language:

Oral language is the critical foundation upon which reading and writing builds. Oral language skills can be expanded and further developed through listening activities, especially the reading aloud of stories, and eventually through reading experiences (Morrow & Strickland 1991).

Carefully chosen children's literature allows students to develop receptive language in an entertaining, meaningful context and naturally invites them to repeat many of the predictable words and phrases, which they gradually take ownership of and add to receptive and productive language. Inoue (1998) describes how classrooms need to encourage English as a Second Language (ESL) students' reading by "using rereading and concepts into students' existing knowledge by using prereading and post reading discussions and open-ended questions."

Research has revealed a significant relationship between listening to texts and vocabulary growth (Elley, 1989). Elley (1989) conducted an experiment whereby 7-year-olds took a pretest targeting particular words and then listened to a story that contained those words three times over the course of a week. The post-test results indicated significant gains in word acquisition.

Natural Language Acquisition Theory:

Literature is not only interesting to students, but it facilitates integration of language skills. It can offer predictable yet natural language which promotes word recognition, as well as opportunities for authentic reading and writing tasks, and it is

not grammatically sequenced. All of these features are in line with the natural language acquisition theory.

Authentic literature is often referred to as "real books" or "trade books" (Rudman 1989). Basically, these are the books that can be found in the library and include a wide range of fiction and nonfiction texts that authentically represent many cultures presented from diverse perspectives.

By giving students exposure to authentic literature, we provide them with natural language that serves as a model for expanding their language base, helps to increase vocabularies, excites and captivates imaginations, and motivates them to learn. Research shows when different types of students at various grade levels are given authentic literature as the core of the reading program, achievement is higher, and they have more positive attitudes about reading and writing.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods and Procedures:

Overview:

Through conducting a Running Reading Record pre-test and post-test it is possible to collect data that informs the English Language Learners' teacher of the students' reading levels. Running Reading Record is a form of assessment which allows the English Language Learner teacher to determine the accuracy rate at the reading level the student was performing. The accuracy rate was determined as a percentage and broken down into three category descriptions: independent, 95-100%, instructional, 90-94%, and frustration levels 89% and below. The independent reading level was where the students' reading levels were determined.

After determining each of the students' baseline reading levels, The English Language Learner teacher introduced the first of three author studies to the students. The English Language Learners' teacher's three authors included: Eric Carle, Tomie DePaola, and Tedd Arnold. These three authors were chosen due to their popularity and accessibility of materials for the students. The English Language Learner teacher designed a PowerPoint presentation for each of the authors. The PowerPoint presentations included a short biography, pictures of the author, and books by the author. The English Language Learner teacher gathered a collection of each author's books and created displays in the classroom. Each display consisted of the author's name, a picture, short biography, and book cover pictures. Each author study lasted for one day a week for a period of two weeks.

After the introduction of the author, the English Language Learner teacher conducted read alouds with the selected books from each author. These read alouds consisted of predictions, picture walks, readings, and open discussions. After reading the books to the students, the English Language Learner teacher asked the students several story component questions and wrote the students' oral responses on a chart for all the students to see. The questions included: (Holdaway 1979)

What did you notice about the illustrations?

Who were the characters in the story?

Where did the setting take place?

What was the problem in the story?

What was the solution?

What was the message of the story?

Discuss unknown vocabulary.

After each of the three author studies, the English Language Learner teacher conducted a project for the students to complete. The projects consisted of an art project and/or a writing project.

After the students completed the author studies, which lasted for one quarter, the English Language Learner teacher administered the Running Reading Records assessment to the same students again. The English Language Learner teacher compared the students beginning baseline reading level to the ending level to determine if the students' reading levels decreased, increased, or stayed the same.

Design:

The researcher selected students, discussed validity and reliability measures, completed field procedures, and evaluated the action research.

Selection of Subjects:

A first, second, and third grade English Language Learner class were the focus of this action research project. Each class met for thirty minutes a day, five times a week. All the students were orally bilingual in English and Spanish.

The first grade class consisted of one girl. She struggled with learning to blend sounds together. She did know the 31 sounds of the letters. Last year when she began Kindergarten, she did not speak any English. She now has a much broader vocabulary and communicates verbally in English.

The second grade class consisted of one girl. She was in the bottom 5% of reading ability in her class. She was bilingual in Spanish and English.

The third grade class consists of five male students. This group was divided into two groups during thirty minutes of instruction. The English Language Learner teacher worked with the two lower reading ability students, and the paraprofessional worked with the other three higher reading ability students.

In the English Language Learners' teacher's classroom one of the students received special education services for reading. Last year, during second grade, he mastered all the sounds of the letters. The other student was being tested for ADD. He was not able to complete the general education requirements for the third grade reading assignments.

The paraprofessional's other group had one boy who was able to pass reading at the third grade level. He started school in Plainview during his first grade year, and

came speaking no English. The second boy in that group received special education services for reading. He was retained in Kindergarten. The third boy in that group was not able to pass third grade level reading material.

Validity Measures:

All the students' reading levels were assessed. The students were introduced to the same three children's authors and a variety of children's literature. The English Language Learner teacher and classroom environment remained the same. All students were required to complete the same activities during the author studies. Students stated they were excited for Fridays to see what books they would be able to explore and read. The English Language Learner teacher felt the research project was valid in exposing students to literature.

Reliability Measures:

It was the first time the researcher assessed students using Running Reading Records. The students' first exposure to Running Reading Records may not be reliable. The overall research project may not have included an adequate sample size, resulting in inconsistent measures.

Field Procedures:

After conducting the Running Reading Records pre-test, followed by the author studies, and finally the Running Reading Records post-test, the English Language Learner teacher examined the data to determine if there was a change in the students' reading levels.

Conclusion:

A design of study was chosen by the researcher, students were selected to participate in the study, validity and reliability measure were taken into consideration, and Running Reading Records were used to assess the students' baseline reading levels and final reading levels.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Discussion

Procedures:

Data was collected using the Running Reading Record pretest and post test for the six students who participated in this study (Appendix A). Data was charted and analyzed. Each students' baseline reading level was assessed using Running Reading Records. The reading levels were measured and given a letter in accordance with their results as appointed by Fountas and Pinnell. (Appendix B) The six students reading levels ranged from level C being the lowest to level N being the highest. Before the study was conducted, the baseline showed student one was at reading level C, student two was at reading level E, student three was at reading level E, student four was at reading level K, student five was at reading level N, and student six was at reading level L. (Appendix C)

After each of the six students' baselines was assessed, the first of the author studies began. Each of the three author studies began with PowerPoint showing pictures of the authors, books they had written, and personal information. This was the English Language Learners first experience with PowerPoint presentations in this class. Many of the students made comments during the presentations. Some of the comments included that they had seen or read one of the books. They liked seeing the faces that go with the names of the authors. They asked if the English Language Learner teacher had a specific book that was shown.

After exploring the books, a project was completed using an idea from each of the authors. After studying and reading about Eric Carle and his works, the students

constructed their own Hungry Caterpillar book. After investigating Tedd Arnold and his works, the students wrote and illustrated their own Huggly book. After exploring Tomie DePaola, the students created a picture using cotton balls in relationship to the book The Cloud Book.

Results after the author study showed two students, student two and six, increased reading levels by two levels, and four students, students one, three, four, and five, remained at the same reading levels. (Appendix C) The percentage change in reading levels was a 33% increase in reading levels, 67% had no change in reading levels, and 0% showed no decrease in reading levels. (Appendix D)

Variables:

The particular attitude or mood of individuals on the day of the Running Reading Record pretest and post test could be a factor in the individual reading level results.

Absences affected the number of authors, books, and activities the student was exposed to. If a student was absent, they did not make up missing instruction.

Hypothesis Testing:

Running Reading Records were used to test the hypothesis. Data was collected, charted, and graphed.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusion

Introduction:

The results of the research project has led the researcher to believe that author studies used to increase reading levels were inconclusive, and that there may be other factors that could have influenced the results of the research. Out of the six students who participated in this study, only two students showed an increase in reading levels while the other four students remained at the same reading level.

Summary of results:

After completing the research, 33% of the six students showed an increase in reading levels, 67% had no change in reading levels, and 0% showed a decrease in reading levels. The two students who showed an increase in reading levels, showed an increase by two reading levels.

Conclusions:

After compiling the data from the research, the results were found to be inconclusive and proved to be statistically insignificant. It did show growth in reading levels for two students, but no growth was shown in the other four students. The research project did expose the English Language Learners to a wide variety of books by three children's authors, but the reading level results were inconclusive. During the research project for this class the students appeared excited by the PowerPoint presentations, books reads, and projects. The students expressed that they could not wait until Friday, so they would be able to learn about a new author and explore the books.

Recommendations:

If this research project was conducted again, a few changes would need to be made. The study would need to be of longer duration. By exposing the students to the authors only once a week did not appear to be enough time. We were not able to cover all of the authors' books in that amount of time.

The researcher would include more participants. The sample size was not large enough to determine if gains were significant or not. The participants would include Kindergarten through sixth grade students. By exposing students at a younger age to the authors, they would become familiar with a greater number of authors in their elementary school experience. Small groups do not allow for real statistical analysis. With statistical analysis it can be concluded that real growth was made.

All other curriculum would need to be cut out, and the focus would solely be on the author studies. The researcher would include the books into the English Language Learners curriculum.

More than just a pre and post test would be needed to assess reading level growth as students experience better testing days than others. A check system to monitor books read outside the classroom before and during the study would be needed.

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Appendix A

Example of Running Reading Records Data Sheet

Reading a-z Running Record

Level D

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Who Runs Faster?
95 words

Have the student read out loud as you record.

Assessed by _____

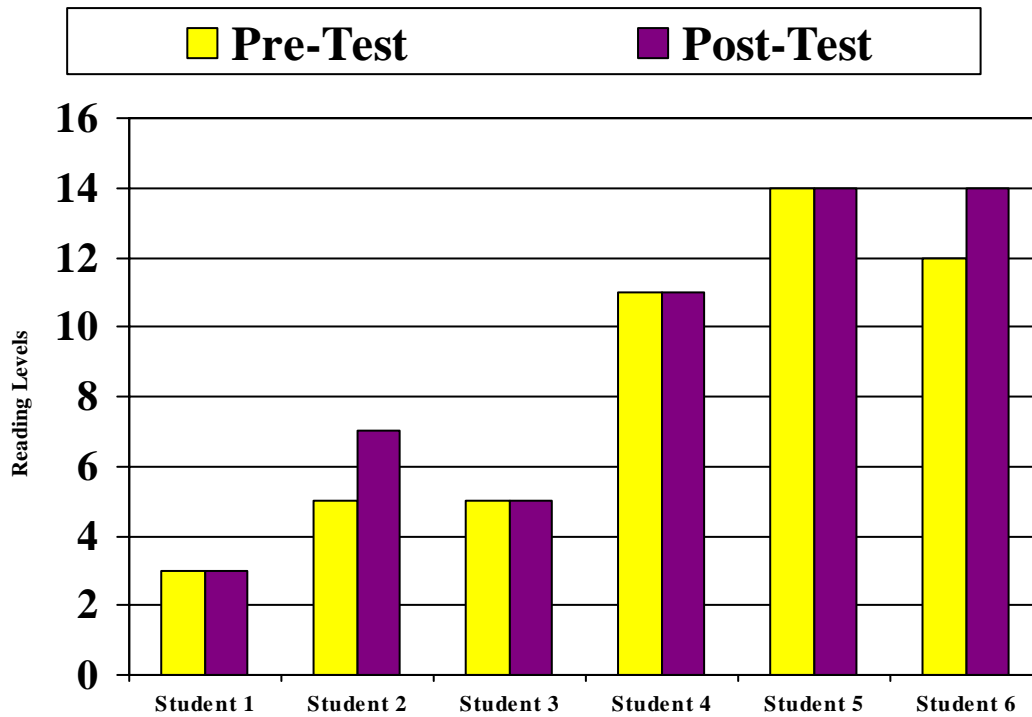
page		E = errors S-C = self-correction M = meaning S = structure V = visual				E	S-C	E			S-C		
								M	S	V	M	S	V
3	This is a tortoise. A squirrel can run faster than a tortoise.												
4	This is a squirrel. A girl can run faster than a squirrel.												
5	This is a girl. A giraffe can run faster than a girl.												
6	This is a giraffe. A zebra can run faster than a giraffe.												
7	This is a zebra. A lion can run faster than a zebra.												
8	This is a lion. An antelope can run faster than a lion.												
9	This is an antelope. A cheetah can run faster than an antelope.												
10	This is a cheetah. Nothing can run faster than a cheetah.												
Totals													

Appendix B

Grade Level	Fountas & Pinnell Guided Reading	Reading Recovery	Guided Reading Format
Kindergarten	A	1	Early Emergent
	B	2	
	C	3	
		4	
Grade 1	D	5	Upper Emergent #1
		6	
	E	7	
		8	
	F	9	Upper Emergent #2
		10	
	G	11	
		12	
	H	13	Early Fluency #1
		14	
		15	
	I	16	Early Fluency #2
Grade 2		17	
	J	18	
	K	19	Fluency to Literature Circles
		20	
	L	End Reading Recovery Levels	
	M		
Grade 3		Advanced Levels	
	N	21	
		22	
	O		
		24	
	P		
Grade 4	Q	26	
	R		

Appendix C

Running Reading Record Assessments



Reading Level Equivalency

1=Level A	8= Level H
2=Level B	9= Level I
3=Level C	10=Level J
4=Level D	11=Level K
5=Level E	12=Level L
6=Level F	13=Level M
7=Level G	14=Level N

Appendix D

% Changes in Reading Levels

No Change In
Reading Level
67% (Green)

Increase in
Reading Level
33% Blue

Decrease in Reading



DOES ACCELERATED READER HAVE POSITIVE AND MOTIVATIONAL
EFFECTS ON STUDENT READING LEVELS AND STUDENT ATTITUDE
TOWARD READING?

by

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B.S. MANKATO STATE UNIVERSITY, 1998

A capstone submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Winona State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Science

Department of Education

December 2004

This capstone entitled:

Does Accelerated Reader Have Positive And Motivational Effects On Student Reading
Levels And Student Attitude Toward Reading?

written by Amanda R. Kylo

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Faculty Advisor

Date _____

The final copy of the capstone has been examined by the signatories, and we find that
both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in
the above mentioned discipline.

I dedicate this capstone to my husband, Todd
and my daughter, Arin.

I love you both so very much for supporting me in my quest for my Masters. Thank you
for you all the patience and love.

Kyllo, Amanda R (M.S., Education)

Does Accelerated Reader Have Positive and Motivational Effects on Student Reading Levels and Student Attitude Toward Reading?

Capstone directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to help identify the factors that motivate elementary students to read and to find out how using the Accelerated Reader program effected students reading levels. This study included student surveys and student test results. The evaluation was focused on a fourth grade class of 18 students. This practice was done in a classroom with prior knowledge and use of the Accelerated Reader program.

The study was conducted over a 12-week period. Data was collected on the students reading levels pre and posttest. Students were surveyed according to their perceived effectiveness of the Accelerated Reader program on students reading. These results were recorded on graphs.

Students in this classroom appeared to be motivated by finding good and interesting materials to read and by having the opportunity to earn rewards for their reading success. It was found that students did enjoy participating in the Accelerated Reader program, but really failed to mention that Accelerated Reader was the true motivator behind it. Student reading levels increased as outside motivational factors were introduced. It appeared Accelerated Reader itself might not be enough motivation to read books. When coupled with rewards and praise the Accelerated Reader program seemed to function, as it should.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1	6
Introduction.....	6
<i>Need for the Study</i>	6
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	7
<i>Purpose of the Study</i>	8
<i>Statement of the Hypothesis</i>	8
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	8
<i>Limitations and Delimitations of the Study</i>	9
CHAPTER II.....	10
Literature Review.....	10
CHAPTER III	13
Methods and Procedures	13
<i>Over View</i>	13
<i>Design</i>	13
<i>Selection of Students</i>	14
<i>Validity of Measures</i>	15
<i>Reliability Measures</i>	15
<i>Conclusion</i>	16
Chapter IV.....	17
Results and Discussion	17
<i>Introduction</i>	17
<i>Procedure</i>	17
<i>Variables</i>	18
<i>Hypothesis Testing</i>	18
Chapter V	20
Summary and Conclusion	20
<i>Introduction</i>	20
<i>Summary of Results</i>	20
<i>Conclusions</i>	25
<i>Recommendations</i>	25
References.....	26
Appendix A.....	27
Appendix B	28
Appendix C	i
Appendix D.....	ii

CHAPTER 1
Introduction
Need for the Study

As educators, we are always looking for new and innovative ways to motivate students to learn. There is a concern that students are not motivated to read and are not developing lifelong reading skills. Students need to feel motivated, as motivation is the key to learning these lifelong reading skills. In order to obtain this object, the task of making reading a pleasurable experience becomes a focus. The problem encountered in a classroom is that students lack the motivation to pick up a book and read. Picking up a video game seems much more entertaining and pleasurable. In an article of “Issues and Technology Use in Reading Instruction” written by Dr. Marlow Ediger (1998), Dr. Ediger stated that technology provides new avenues for students to engage in exciting reading curriculum and provides more efficiency in the process. The Accelerated Reader program, a computer based reading management system, lends itself to accomplishing these tasks by motivating reading and creating a manageable system to let teachers monitor their progress.

It really has become apparent right around the beginning of third grade and continuing on through elementary school, reading is a very fundamental part of the learning in many of the subject areas including science and social studies. If a student is expected to read a text and then answer comprehension questions pertaining to that text, the student should be able to hold his or her own and accomplish the task. Unfortunately

too many students are not obtaining this procedure and we are seeing significant deficiencies.

Large amounts of time and school resources are devoted to implementing and maintaining the Accelerated Reading (AR) Program. This research will explore the effects the Accelerated Reader program has on student reading. It seems important to identify the factors that motivate the students to read and to determine if students and teachers believe the Accelerated Reader reading management program provided these reading motivators. It has become a need to determine if the Accelerated Reader program lives up to its high expectation educators and the makers of the program have claimed it accomplishes. This includes motivating students to read more, therefore increasing reading achievement, and an overall increase in student's positive attitudes about reading.

Statement of the Problem

Reading is an essential key to the success a student experiences not only in their learning environment but also in the world around them. Each student is different in their interests and their likes. If it was possible to hand the same book out to each child and have them fully read and understand the material in it would be ideal. Unfortunately, this is not a reality. Reward and success often motivate students. The Accelerated Reader program is one that offers students the chance to experience success through test taking and seeing their results through test scores and reading levels. Is the Accelerated Reader

program itself enough of a motivator or are the outside rewards of tangible gifts and certificates?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the effects the Accelerated Reader program has on students reading levels and students' attitude about the skill of reading.

Statement of the Hypothesis

The Accelerated Reader program does motivate students to read more, increase their reading achievement, and shows a positive increase in students' attitudes than the idea of having students read on their own without the influence of a motivator or reward program.

Definition of Terms

Accelerated Reader Program (AR): The Accelerated Reader program is a computerized management system of literature based reading programs. The goal is to increase reading practice for students while giving teachers information about the books read and the comprehension level attained by the student. Reading levels of the books included in the Accelerated Reader program are calculated and then assigned a maximum Accelerated Reader point value, derived from its length and reading level.

Reading Achievement: A measurable amount of progress in the ability to read and understand the reading material.

Reading Comprehension: The ability to understand the content read.

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR): Sustained silent reading is a teaching activity where learners have a period of uninterrupted silent reading.

S.T.A.R.: Measures students' reading comprehension through computerized testing, but its focus is the measurement of reading improvement. It gives a reading level range used as a guide for selecting Accelerated Reader books.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The process of determining the subjects for this study was limited to those students currently in the classroom teachers' room. A limitation of this study would be the ability of measuring student's attitude toward reading and attributing that alone to the Accelerated Reader program. Students come from a variety of backgrounds and family lifestyles where emphasis towards consistent out-pouring support toward that student and their achievements may be lacking. Some students may see more home support direction for their reading goals. Proving that Accelerated Reader is a program that will promote life long learning is a challenge due to a limited period with the designated age group of this study.

This study was conducted through a twelve-week period. The students were tested during the first month of the school year to establish baselines. These same students participated in the repeated reading activities during the twelve- week study period. They were tested again to determine if there was any growth while participating in the study.

CHAPTER II
Literature Review
Introduction

When students are motivated to read, they will read more books and grow as readers. Predictably, poor readers have unfavorable attitudes toward reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p.15). These children will do anything in their power to avoid reading at any cost. Accelerated Reader is a program that promises to motivate independent reading practice, to develop “lifelong love of reading and critical skills in each child, to increase the circulation of books from the school library, and to improve scores on performance-based and standardized tests. The Accelerated Reader program claims to increase reading skills and motivate all students regardless of ability (Accelerated Reader, 1998). The Accelerated Reader program is one of great respect among its users and one that can offer a variety of books at a variety of reading levels. This software program is a computerized management program that inspires kids to read more and better books.

The Accelerated Reader program is really based on a series of three simple steps that tend to form a foundation for self-paced, individualized reading (Accelerated Reader, 2001). The student self-selects an Accelerated Reader book to read in their zone of proximal development or “reading range.” Once the child has selected their book, they

read the book and then take a computerized, multiple-choice, comprehension test on the book. The program tends to provide instant scores and immediate reinforcement in an encouraging way. The key to the program is, the more books the student reads, the more tests and quizzes they take and the more points they earn. Depending on the school, rewards are given at various point levels to students. In some instances, awards are also given for word count totals as well. The individual teachers or districts establish these rewards.

Accelerated Reader's enormous database of more than 21,000 test titles ensures plenty of variety in a student's reading choices. The cost of implementing Accelerated Reader varies, depending on licensing requirements and the number of tests purchased, and can range from several hundred to several thousands of dollars. The books in the program can be found in many school libraries and represents classics and current favorites, as well as plenty of nonfiction titles. The titles in Accelerated Reader are assigned point values according to difficulty, and students are held accountable for the number of points they can earn by how well they have read the book.

It has become clear that another important factor of Accelerated Reader is independent reading. Sustained Silent Reading (S.S.R) or in many schools, also known as, D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything And Read), can be one more tool for developing lifelong readers. Some may also refer to it as recreational reading or independent reading. Whatever one may call it, many teachers will set aside a block of time each day, between fifteen and thirty minutes, depending on the grade level and the ability of the students, for

quiet reading. Arguably, students need to practice silent reading at a level exposing them to the challenge of new vocabulary and concepts- within their zone of proximal development (Dixonkrauss, 1995).

The best reading practice is reading (Lee-Daniels, Murray, 2000). Practice seems a necessity in ensuring all students develop into skilled readers. Avid readers can improve reading fluency, comprehension and acquire new vocabulary (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Not all students or even adults develop good reading skills or become literate. One who is literate uses “printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (United States Department of Education, 2002, p.2). Students who develop good reading skills early on in their lives tend to become better readers and find reading is enjoyable. Coincidentally, students who develop poor reading skills and are having trouble decoding, recognizing words and developing fluency, tend to remain a poor reader. Poor readers often do not associate enjoyment with reading and thus begin having achievement problems in other academic subjects (Stanovich, 1994).

Chapter III

Methods and Procedures

Over View

The Accelerated Reader program can be a very beneficial and successful program. It can be a fantastic motivator to help students achieve success in their reading skills and comprehension. In this study, 18 fourth grade elementary students were involved in experiencing the Accelerated Reader program and what it has to offer. The class was split randomly into two groups of nine. The study was conducted over a twelve week period ranging from January to March 2003. Assessment tools were used to determine student-reading levels affected by the Accelerated Reader program. The tools were used to help the classroom teacher evaluate students' progress from the beginning of the study until the end. Student surveys were also given out at the end of the study questioning the students on their thoughts on the effectiveness of the Accelerated Reader program.

Design

This study was comprised of 18 fourth grade students that were randomly split into two groups. One group would receive praise and reward for their accomplishments while the other would not receive the praise and rewards. During the first month of the study, the subjects were all treated the same and received the same amount of attention, praise and reward. Beginning in the second month and running the duration of the study, Group A received high praise and the traditional awards associated with the current running of the Accelerated Reader program. When meeting in our small group meeting time, Group A was acknowledged for their

reading of books and the number of points that they had accumulated since the last meeting. Group A participants were also given prizes and certificates if they had reached the point goal they were to attain. Group B was encouraged to read books, but that was the extent of contact with them. Group B also met in small group with the classroom teacher, but discussion was limited to any problems that anyone was encountering to how they were doing that particular day. Group B participants did not receive recognition or rewards for attaining point goals.

Selection of Students

The subjects for this study were all of the current students in the teachers' fourth grade classroom for the school year 2003-2004. There were 18 students in this study. They were randomly put into two groups of nine.

Instruments/Measuring Devices

The first assessment tool used was the S.T.A.R. Reading Test by Advantage Learning Systems. This test is used to determine the reading level of the student by having the student answer a series of computerized questions to determine the students instructions reading level (IRI). The S.T.A.R. test calculates the students IRI by determining the highest level at which the student can answer 80 percent or more of the items on the test correct. Each of the students in the study took the S.T.A.R. test at the beginning of the year when they began using the Accelerated Reader program. That score was used as the starting benchmark for the students. At the end of the study, the students took the S.T.A.R. test again to compare the reading levels.

The second tool that was used in this study was that of a student survey. The survey consisted of ten questions. In the first eight questions, students were asked to circle the emotion that best answered the question. The four different emotions that the students chose from were great, good, ok, and unhappy. (See appendix for results) The last two questions were open-ended and they asked 1. The one thing that I like the most about Accelerated Reader is..... and 2. The thing I would change about Accelerated Reader is.... (See list of student responses)

Validity of Measures

Testing students at the beginning of the year using the STAR reading test helped determine their reading level. The S.T.A.R. test was again administrated at the beginning of the study and students completed the testing at the end of the 12-week study period. Comparing the test scores from these assessments will determine how much growth has occurred on each student's reading level. These scores will be compared with the scores from the first half of the year's test results to determine if the Accelerated Reader program was successful in increasing student reading levels and motivational attitudes.

Reliability Measures

Each student will complete the S.T.A.R. test and be evaluated at grade level before the leveled AR reading will take place. This will give an indication of reading readiness before instruction begins. Students will read books at their reading levels and answer questions according the text. Weekly reports will be run to maintain contact on the progress made by each student.

Conclusion

This study was designed to determine if the Accelerated Reader program had positive and motivational effects on students reading levels and student attitude toward reading. This study will be conducted over a twelve-week time-period with current fourth grade students. The students will be asked to test on reading questions that are at their instructional reading level. They will then begin reading various books at the suggested reading levels. The students will test on the questions a second time. Results from both reading tests will be graphed so students can see their results. The classroom teacher will meet with each of the groups every two weeks and discuss their reading test scores.

Students will be given a survey to complete asking then various questions pertaining to the Accelerated Reader program. Results of this survey will be used in correlation to the students group to see if one group felt more excitement and motivation toward the program than the other did. The results that are concluded from the test scores and survey results will be compared with the hypothesis to determine if it is correct.

Chapter IV
Results and Discussion
Introduction

In order to understand if the Accelerated Reader program implemented in the school district really got children to read out of pure motivation to find and read great books, a study was conducted to see what the real motivation was behind it.

Procedure

The study was comprised of eighteen fourth grade students, all of them participating in the Accelerated Reader program. The large group was broken down into two small groups of nine. These groups were randomly chosen. Using the prior baseline reading level acquired at the beginning of the school year, students began to chose titles of interest that were at their reading levels. Both of the groups participated in a daily forty-five minute SSR reading time devoted to Accelerated Reader reading. Students could also use other times to read their books, but they specifically had a forty-five minute block of time each day for reading. Once a student had finished the book they were reading they could take the comprehension test associated with the book. The tests are computerized, as this kept track of scores.

Twice a week the classroom teacher would meet with each group, first as a whole then on an individual basis. Reports were ran and the classroom teacher would discuss the results of them with the students. Participants in Group A received active and constructive comments pertaining to the information acquired from the tests. Awards were given out to those students that had achieved the reading goals as well

as words of praise and recognition. Those that were in Group B also met with the classroom teacher. Test scores were examined and verbal recognition was given to those that has attained the reading goal, but no reward or award was given. At the end of the study, students will again test using the S.T.A.R. test to have a comparison of reading levels to note any growth in reading readiness. A survey was also given to students at the end of the study period to gain insight into the motivational components of participating in AR.

Variables

A variable that may have affected the results of the study was student attitude. Group B students became frustrated and did not put as much effort into the end of the study testing as they had in the beginning. The students might have been tired of not receiving encouragement from the classroom teacher, as they had received in the beginning of the year.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis for the study was that Accelerated Reader did increase students reading levels and increase their motivation toward reading. The hypothesis was tested by comparing the baseline reading levels to those acquired at the end of the study. The results of these tests were recorded and compared to show how much if any improvements the students had made.

Testing of the students took place in the fall, at the beginning of the study and at the conclusion of the study using the S.T.A.R. test. This test gives a scaled score

along with a reading level equivalent. The difference between the gains from fall to the beginning of the study to the end was calculated. The study occurred the second half of the year, so comparing the gains from the first half of the year to the second half of the year when the study took place would indicate if the students showed any growth.

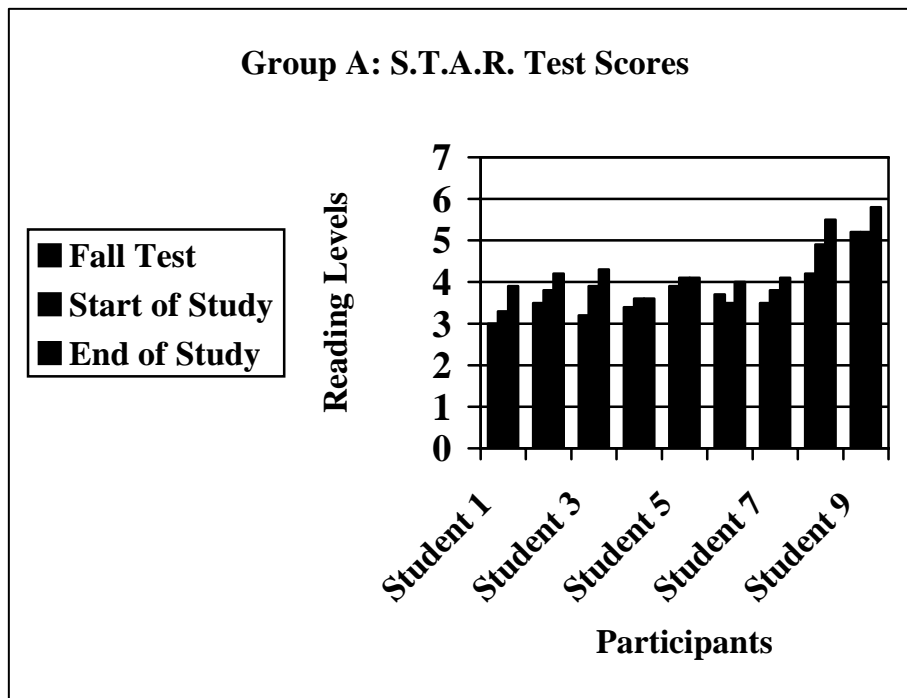
Chapter V
Summary and Conclusion
Introduction

In this study, the Accelerated Reader program was used to determine if it affects the students reading levels and the students motivation to read. Eighteen students were given the Star Reading test in the fall, at the start of the study, and at the end of the study to determine their reading levels. The study took place over a twelve-week period. By comparing the reading levels results after each testing period and organizing the answers given in the post-study survey, it was easy to say I wasn't surprised with the results. In addition, it was interesting to see the answers from the student survey and the responses it generated.

Summary of Results

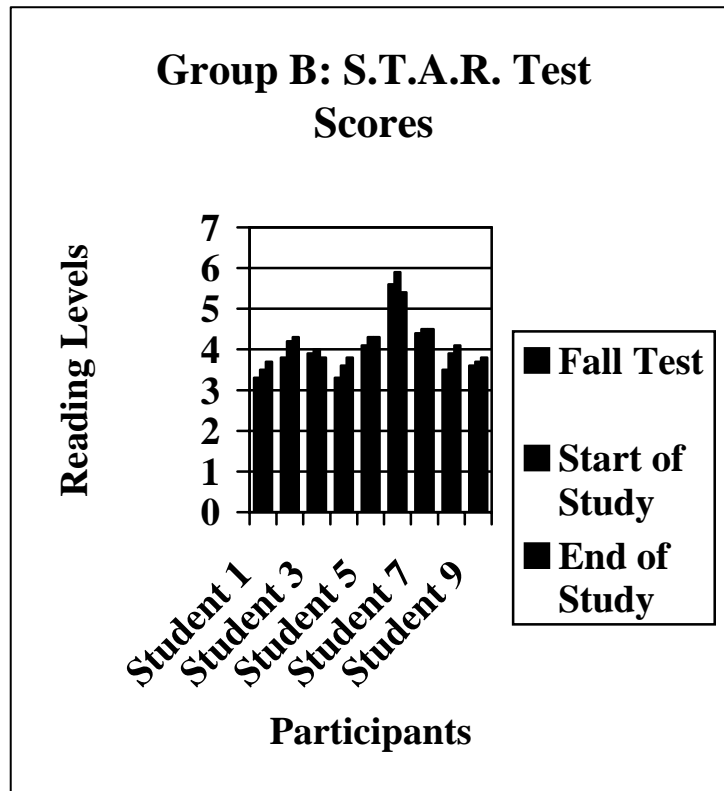
Group A & Group B

The results from Group A showed a healthy increase in reading level achievement. When comparing the test scores the growth was apparent (See appendix A). Out of the eight fourth grade students who participated in the study as Group A, all eight showed growth when comparing the three testing periods. (See chart on the following page for results.) Many of the student tested from fall to the start of the study had not shown much, if any, reading level growth. When adding in the test scores from the end of the study, it really showed a dramatic appearance of achievement.



The scores from Group B were compared next. The difference between the fall scaled score and the start of the study were determined (See Appendix A). Then the difference between the start of the study to the end of the study was computed. Overall, the students showed less growth from the start of study time-period to the end of the study. It is important to note that all of the students showed gains in reading from the fall time-period.

Although the overall scores show growth from the fall to the start of the study for all nine of the students, there were six of nine students who did not show a significant growth from the start of the study to the end of the study. Of those students, two even lowered their score. It became clear that these students had lost interest in the Accelerated Reader program. The lack of reward and motivational praise had really started to take a toll. (See chart below for results.)



Student Survey Results

The classroom teacher had used the Accelerated Reader program to determine if the reading and testing of books had a positive and motivational effect on students reading achievement. Eighteen students participated in this study.

The student results were very interesting. On the questions one through four students were asked to put an “X” in the box that best described their emotion towards the question. Their four choices were great, good, OK, and unhappy. On questions five through eight the students were

asked to put an “X” in the box that best showed how they felt about the questions. Their three choices were yes, no, and sometimes.

Table 1: Student Survey Responses- student answers on the survey

When asked to mark the box on how you feel about reading in school? Eleven answered great, five answered good, and two answered OK. This would indicate that there is a bit of discrepancy in where students feel comfortable reading. On question number two when asked how do you feel about the Accelerated Reader program, fourteen responded with great, and four responded with good. This tells the classroom teacher that the program is well liked by her students. That is very encouraging. No one answered they did not like the program. Question number three asks how do you feel about your ability to read? The results were a bit surprising. Eight students answered that they were a great reader, eight answered that they were a good reader and two answered that they were an OK reader. There really seemed to be a split in how the students saw themselves capable of reading. In questions five through eight, the responses again were very positive and upbeat. In question five, asking do you enjoy reading? Fourteen answered yes and four answered sometimes. In question number six, students were asked if they thought that they were a better reader now than in the beginning of the year? Fifteen answered yes and three answered no. Question 7 asked do you think that Accelerated Reader has helped you become a better reader? All 18 answered yes. This one was interesting considering that in the previous question three, student’s thought they

weren't a better reader! In the last question, do you enjoy taking Accelerated Reader tests? Sixteen answered yes and two answered no.

When looking at the open-ended question The thing I like most about Accelerated Reader is.... very positive things were said in regards to the Accelerated Reader Program. Some of the responses were the following (see verbatim student responses):

Helps me read better

Makes me read more so I can get more points

You get cool prizes

It makes me read more

On question number ten it stated, The thing I would change about Accelerated Reader is... students had a variety of answers for ways to change the program. Some of the responses were the following (see verbatim student responses):

Put more books on the list

Nothing

Make the tests easier

Let kids make up the tests

Overall, I was happy with the results of the student survey. I had a feeling that the students answered the questions truthfully and to the best of their ability. This fourth grade class, overall, really seemed to have a positive attitude towards Accelerated Reader and that was reflected in the

survey. I would find it interesting to follow up on this survey by randomly choosing students whom had taken the survey and interview them further on related topics in the survey.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to help identify if Accelerated Reader had positive and motivational effects on student reading levels and student attitude toward reading. When looking at the S.T.A.R. test data, it was clear to see that those that received the greater amount of praise and award actually brought their reading levels up, while those that did not receive that praise did not show a significant improvement in their levels. It is the conclusion of the classroom teacher that Accelerated Reader itself may not be enough of a motivation to read books. This finding delivers the idea that it isn't the Accelerated Reader program itself that was motivating the study group, it was the Accelerated Reader program coupled with rewards and praise that helped the Accelerated Reader program function as it should. When students experienced success and saw their own reading growth, they reflected a positive attitude and an enthusiasm toward the program. It became apparent that teachers have to help motivate the students, the Accelerated Reader program can not do it alone.

Recommendations

If this study were to be conducted again, it would be beneficial to include specific questions of what exactly the student was working toward while attaining points.

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Appendix A

Group A Star Test Scores

	S-1	S-2	S-3	S-4	S-5	S-6	S-7	S-8	S-9
Fall Test	3	3.5	3.2	3.4	3.9	3.7	3.5	4.2	5.2
Start of Study	3.3	3.8	3.9	3.6	4.1	3.5	3.8	4.9	5.2
End of Study	3.9	4.2	4.3	3.6	4.1	4	4.1	5.5	5.8

Group B Star Test Scores

	S-1	S-2	S-3	S-4	S-5	S-6	S-7	S-8	S-9
Fall Test	3.3	3.8	3.9	3.3	4.1	5.6	4.4	3.5	3.6
Start of Study	3.5	4.2	4	3.6	4.3	5.9	4.5	3.9	3.7
End of Study	3.7	4.3	3.8	3.8	4.3	5.4	4.5	4.1	3.8

Appendix B

	<i>GREAT</i>	GOOD	OK	UNHAPPY
1. How do you feel about reading at school?	11	5	2	0
2. How do you feel about Accelerated Reader?	14	4	0	0
3. How do you feel about your ability to read?	8	8	2	0
4. How does receiving an award for your reading in Accelerated Reader make you feel?	10	3	5	0
	<i>YES</i>	NO	Sometimes	
5. Do you enjoy reading?	14	0	4	
6. Are you a better reader now than you were at the beginning of the year?	15	3	0	
7. Do you think that the Accelerated Reader program has helped you become a better reader?	18	0	0	
8. Do you enjoy taking the Accelerated Reader tests?	16	0	2	

Appendix C

9. *The thing I like most about Accelerated Reader is.....*

It makes me read more
Helps me improve my reading level
Gets you points and makes you want to read more
Makes I can take tests on the computer
Forces me to read

you read books that you haven't read before
You get points
You get cool prizes
I can read books that I like
I don't have to write a book report
Getting points and reading
I could get my name on a poster
You can earn points to get neat prizes
It makes me want to read more so I can get more points
Taking the tests
Makes me read more so I can get more points
Helps me read better
Makes me read slower and more carefully

Appendix D

10. The thing I would change about Accelerated Reader is.....

put more books on the list
have easier questions
not to do AR
nothing, I love AR
put some of the stories on tape
let kids make up the tests
have more choices of books
assign more points in some books
still read the book, but not take the test
not to HAVE to do it everyday
nothing
more books
nothing, AR is GREAT
get new prizes
make the tests easier
have easier test questions
be able to start AR right away when we start school
nothing

DOES THE METHOD OF READING HELP IMPROVE STUDENT
COMPREHENSION?

by

AMY MATUSKA

B. S. University of Northern Iowa 1992

A capstone submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Winona State
University

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Science

Department of Education

December 2004

This capstone entitled:

Does the method of reading help improve student comprehension?

Written by Amy Matuska

Has been approved for the Winona State University Department of Education by

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Date_____

The signatories have examined the final copy of the capstone, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above-mentioned discipline.

Matuska, Amy (B.A., English Education)

Does the method of reading increase comprehension?

Capstone directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman, Ph.D.

Abstract

Reading comprehension is an area of constant change and importance. Students even in high school need strategies to help with their comprehension. Students in this project were given three different methods of reading to see which one increased their comprehension.

Students began a unit as usual, with the only change being their style of reading the assignment. The three options were: reading alone; reading with a group, following the paired reading strategy; or reading it aloud as a whole group, primarily led by the teacher. Given the current stress on reading aloud, the hypothesis was that any reading aloud would increase their comprehension and the two group reading methods would score higher for comprehension. Students were given quizzes after each style was completed and the results were as follows: Reading aloud had the best comprehension, reading alone scored second highest, and the reading in groups was lowest. There are numerous reasons why this could have happened. For example, comfort level, distractions, and various reading levels while reading aloud, were a few of the variables considered in the results. It is a project that had worth and interesting results. However, if the researcher were to do it again, there would be some changes made to the reading in groups to help increase their scores.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction.....	7
Need for the study.....	8
Statement of the problem.....	8
Purpose of the study.....	8
Statement of hypothesis.....	8
Definition of terms.....	8-9
Limitations/Delimitation.....	9
Variables.....	9
Independent.....	9
Dependent.....	10
Control.....	10
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	11
III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	14
Overview.....	14
Research Design.....	14
Subjects.....	15
Instruments and Measuring Devices.....	15
Validity Measures.....	15
Reliability Measures.....	16
Procedures.....	16
Conclusion.....	16

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	17
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	20
Recommendations.....	20
VI. REFERENCES.....	22

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been an emphasis on student comprehension in reading. This is easy to see by the infiltration of more testing for students. Even high school students have a required Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) test for critical reading and comprehension. The MCA reading test is placed in the tenth grade year. However, students in the upper grades have gotten away from reading, whether for pleasure or for school. High school students spend less than two percent of each day actually reading (Atwell, 1992). Reading takes a back seat when they get older and they choose easier replacement web sites to read instead. These sites are intended to support student reading but have too commonly replaced their reading of the novel or play. There needs to be a method for getting students back into reading. There is a correlation between the amount a person reads and their ability to comprehend and all ages can benefit from being read to aloud. Jim Trelease (2001) is an advocate for reading aloud and for getting students reading more. Getting students to read is a problem. This study was conducted to see if students were better at understanding the story if the story was read to them, read as a group, or read on their own. Another goal was to see which method the class preferred.

Need for the Study

There is more pressure put on student comprehension now with the Basic Standards Tests and the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) tests required for students. Students are able to find websites that will summarize novels enough so they don't even have to read the book. These websites are intended to support their reading, not replace it, and it is a struggle in the English classroom. There is also an emphasis on reading aloud to students. Even though it is more common in the elementary ages—it can be very beneficial in the high school as well.

Statement of the problem

Students are not reading as much as they have been. This needs to change in order for them to have success in standardized tests as well as increasing their love for reading for pleasure.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this project was to determine which method of reading allows for better comprehension of a story.

Statement of the hypotheses

Reading a book aloud to the class, and having students read it aloud with a group will increase comprehensive scores more than reading a book individually outside of class.

Definition of Terms

Comprehension: the capacity for understanding fully

Reading fluency: capability of reading with ease

Read aloud: students follow along while being read to

Guided Reading/Paired Reading: students reading aloud in a small group or with a partner to practice reading aloud and comprehension skills in a less threatening environment.

Limitations and Delimitations

One limitation for this project was the time of the day class was held. One section was immediately following lunch, which seemed to be a tougher class to get on task. There was no control over the size of the classes or the groupings of students in classes. Also it was not possible to stop those few students who really enjoyed the book from reading ahead or finishing it ahead of the class. However, there were some decisions made with the teacher's choice. For example, the novel read was the instructor's choice, the quizzes given to students were teacher produced, and the teacher selected the groupings of students. It was also the teacher's decision as to which class the project was chosen for.

Variables

Independent Variables.

Some aspects variables of each student in class were the types of learners each student was, their socioeconomic status and background varied for each student as well as in each class. There was no control over students being absent, or making up quizzes. Each class varied in size, which resulted in their group sizes being different. Another factor was when the quizzes were given. There was never enough time the same day to give the quizzes so students had to take them the day after reading the chapter.

Dependent variable.

By varying the methods of reading a book student quiz scores were to increase in two ways the book was read.

Control variables.

The book chosen for the class to read was in the instructor's control. It was also decided to keep the experiment in the same grade level. The quizzes given were consistent within all three classes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reading is a topic of research that many Language Arts teachers are very interested in. In the primary grades reading is an essential area of the curriculum. In the older years there are concepts that are used to help their comprehension as well, and it is needed. For example, according to the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 74 percent of eighth graders have not reached a proficient level in their reading and 26 percent of those students have not reached a basic level (Ash, 2002). Reading Strategies and Practices outlined various ways to increase a student's understanding of what they were reading. One, in particular, was paired reading. This is where students read aloud with a partner. This gives students practice in meaningful oral reading, aids in individualizing instruction, and creates a more non-threatening atmosphere for reading aloud (Tierney, 1990).

Other practices that teachers use to meet the needs of struggling readers are oral reading practice, guiding reading, word study, and writing about reading and using strategies for comprehension. These practices increase critical literacy that is "crucial to an understanding of successful reading in our culture.(Ash, 2002" Daily oral or shared reading have demonstrated to improve students fluency, and confidence in their reading. Teacher read-aloud provides modeling for prosody, parsing, and pronunciation, aiding students' conception of fluent oral reading(Ash, 2002). Teachers could plan time for reading aloud and it was suggested that more teacher read-aloud would improve their classroom reading instruction (Ash, 2002).

Jim Trelease (2001) also speaks about the benefits of children being read aloud to and he has amazing facts on how reading aloud increases a child's word bank. According to Trelease reading books aloud is similar to selling a product. "You cannot bore people into buying your product. You can only interest them in buying it. Reading is the product being sold here. Every read-aloud is an advertisement for pleasure" (Trelease, pg. 42 2001). Especially at the upper levels of school, students really need some direction in what to read and reading aloud excerpts or complete works is an excellent means for that. The benefits of reading aloud are endless and if it helps their comprehension as well, it should be something that is used more. There is evidence that it not only helps in their understanding, but also their grammar because children are more apt to model what they hear .

In the Middle, (1987) by Nancie Atwell discussed reader's workshop. This method is used to increase comprehension as well as enjoyment of reading. Using various reading strategies to assist in comprehension and to vary the method of assessing was the premise for this workshop.

It seems to be consistent that as kids get older, the less they read, especially in school. Less than 2 percent of a high school student's time in school is spent on reading (Atwell, 1987). It is important that students at any age continue to read. The National Assessment of Educational Progress reports that American 13-17 year olds do less reading than 9 year olds(1987). This can be a result of various factors, one of them being a decrease in their comprehension of what they are reading.

There are surpluses of sources that discuss the strategies in helping student comprehension. With the current Minnesota state testing, student comprehension will be continually stressed.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Overview

With a specific unit the tenth graders were given three options to read a novel. The first option was to read it at home as an assignment, the second was the instructor reading it aloud to the class, and the third was paired/group reading where they took turns reading the chapters aloud to their group members. The reading method varied with each chapter. The method of testing student comprehension was implementing small quizzes following each chapter. The goal for this was to measure student comprehension with the chapters read to them or in groups.

Research Design

The unit was started as any other—with some background information about the author, story, setting, vocabulary skills, and making a connection to the story. The only variable changed with this research was the way the book was read. One method was to assign the chapter as homework. The other method was paired/group readings. The class was divided into groups of four or five. According to the reading strategy of paired/group reading it is important to vary the reading ability of each group. Its purpose is to include some stronger readers with lower ability readers. They were given the directions to read as much or little as they chose, but the group had to read aloud the entire block of time. The goal for this reading aloud exercise was to increase comprehension of the story by hearing it while reading. The third method was to have the teacher read the chapter to the class. This, too, was to increase interest and comprehension by listening and following along. The quizzes

were made up by the instructor and were given to all three classes. Quizzes were given the day following the reading of the chapter, prior to class discussion and other exercises. Once the quizzes were given the class continued on as it would with any other reading assignment. Student's results were compiled and put into charts for comparison.

Subjects

The tenth grade classes were chosen partly because the other classes have mixed grades, and partly because there was another factor involved for the tenth grade. They take a reading test their sophomore year to test comprehension and one of the goals was to vary their reading to see what worked for them to comprehend. The students were of average ability with a small percentage of them not having passed the basic standards test.

Instruments and Measuring Devices:

The main measuring devices were the quizzes given following each chapter read. They were based on comprehension of the chapter. The same quiz was given to each student in each class. The quizzes were teacher generated so that may have caused some difference in the results. The students also filled out a survey before and after the novel to capture feelings and reactions to which method they preferred or thought helped them.

Validity measures:

Reading comprehension is what is being measured with this project.

Reliability measures:

A variable might have been the type of quizzes given, but some people may approach the questions from differing perspectives causing some concern for the designated answer.

Procedures:

In most of the classes after doing the pre-reading activities, the book was started. The first day we read it aloud together and the quiz was given the following day. Most often the day began with a quiz, then continued with either reading in groups, class, or doing an activity concerning their reading. If it was a chapter to be read independently—it was assigned as homework. On a day for reading in groups the classes spread out around the room, and one or two groups went into an unused classroom or office. Students took turns reading aloud to their group and were usually very disciplined with their reading. They were monitored closely during a class period. The chapters were long enough to fill the 25 minutes of class designated to the reading. The quizzes on what they had read were given the following day.

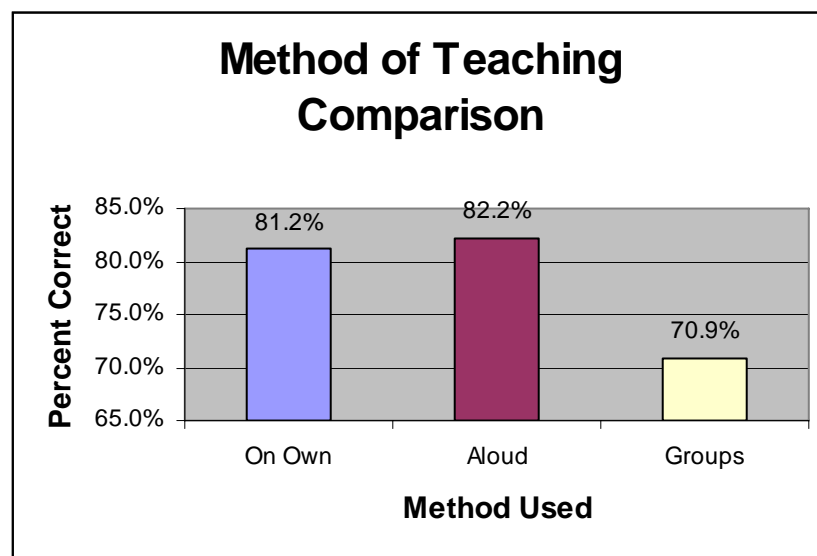
Conclusion

Based on the data, reading aloud in groups did not have the effect expected on the student's comprehension.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this project were surprising. After compiling the student scores, the area that did not have a great impact on their comprehension was reading in a group. The hypothesis for this experiment was that any reading aloud would benefit their comprehension, but in this case it did not. The most successful method was teacher led. The second highest scoring method was reading alone and the third was reading with a group.

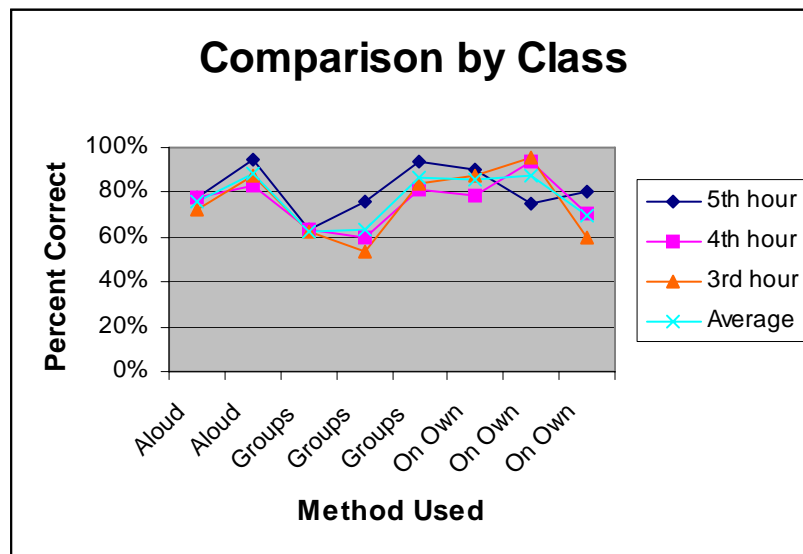
Table 1: Method of teaching comparison



There are many factors that could affect this outcome. For example, the groups were chosen by the instructor so there may have been a comfort factor among some groups; having students change readers quite often can be more distracting than helpful; or the other groups reading at the same time may have caused some distraction from listening to their own group. It was probably a little more fluent when it was teacher read, also.

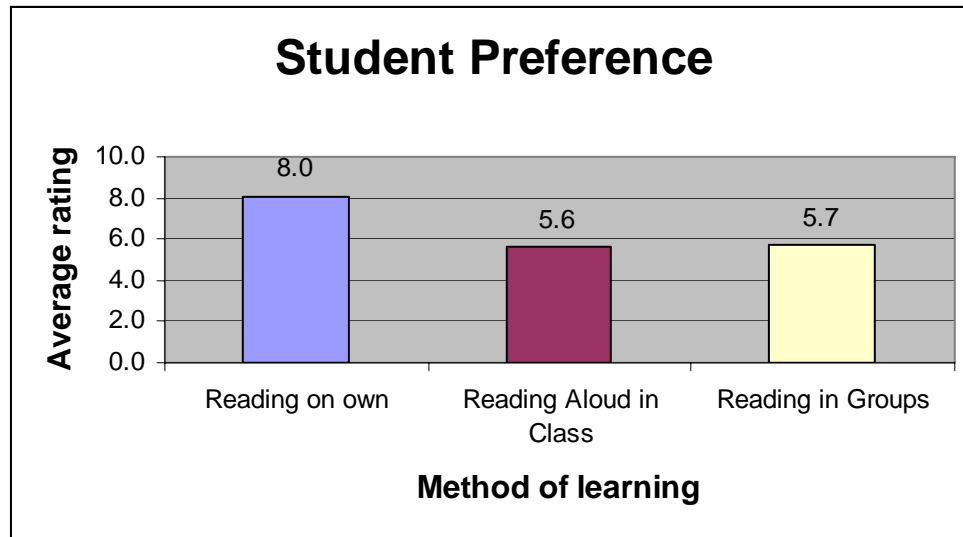
When looking at the results by class, there is a constant increase or decrease for each quiz. There was some consistency in the quizzes given and material understood. There may have been one or two times one class stood out more than others, but generally the trend was consistent.

Table 2: Comparison by class



Students were also polled on their preference of each method. The results were interesting because the surveys allowed them to comment on their rankings. The overwhelming response for not wanting to read it aloud in class was because they were very uncomfortable reading in front of others. However, that was a benefit of doing this and that was to increase their practice in reading aloud.

Table 3: Student Preference



Overall, it was very interesting to see the results of this project. It is something that has some definite value when choosing how to read something for comprehension. Most students did fairly well with all methods, but the independent reading scored the best.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to determine which method of reading would increase reading comprehension. It was concluded by both preference and comprehensive measures used that the best method was to allow the students to read it on their own. The results matched their preference.

Students read a unit with three different techniques, reading aloud by the instructor, reading it aloud in groups, and reading it alone. The desired results for this project were that the two options of having them read aloud would do better than the third option. Independent reading requires more aggressive mental activity than the passive mode being read to requires. This might affect the results and have varying conclusions if given to other grade levels or other levels of readers. However, the data shows the method that scoring the highest was teacher led reading, second was reading alone, and third was reading in groups.

Recommendations

There was some value found in doing this project. It was a point of interest given the increase of importance in reading comprehension. It is a project that the researcher would do again. However, a few things would be changed. One of the most important would be how the group reading was organized. There are numerous factors to consider when making groups as well as what happens while they are reading. Based on the results of this project, it seemed the quizzes were primarily consistent for each class. It may prove more beneficial to format the questions similar to a state assessment test. That way they would have practice for that as well. It was

interesting that the two methods that scored best on the students' comprehension were also the highest on their preference as well. That tells the researcher that those two methods are probably the best choices to go with. Overall, there were many benefits to doing this project as something that could be done again.

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WILL USING A CLASSROOM WORD WALL HELP STUDENTS
SUCCESSFULLY LEARN HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS?

by

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B.S. Winona State University, 1993

A capstone submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

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in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Science

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This capstone entitled:
Will Using a Classroom Word Wall Help Students
Successfully Learn High Frequency Words?

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Will Using a Classroom Word Wall Help Students Successfully Learn High Frequency Words?

Capstone directed by Dr. Tom Sherman

Abstract

Many first grade students were having difficulty learning high frequency words. They were not showing much success in reading the words in sentences or spelling the words correctly. As a result, a classroom word wall was implemented to help students be more successful in learning the high frequency words. The study included twenty first grade students which lasted six weeks.

Thirty high frequency words were chosen from district reading curriculum to teach. Five words were introduced and taught each week. For the first three weeks the students practiced reading the words on flash cards. The students were also exposed to the words through stories read from the reading series.

For the next three weeks word wall activities were used to teach the high frequency words. Every day the students would cheer the words in a variety of ways, write the words, and play games using the words.

At the end of each week students were given a spelling test, word test, and a sentence test to assess their progress. Results indicated that the word wall activities did help improve students ability to read and spell the high frequency words.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.....	1
Introduction.....	1
<i>Need for the Study</i>	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	1
<i>Purpose of the Study</i>	1
<i>Statement of the Hypothesis</i>	2
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	2
<i>Limitations and Delimitations of the Study</i>	2
CHAPTER II.....	4
Literature Review.....	4
<i>Introduction</i>	4
<i>Definition of a Word Wall</i>	4
<i>High Frequency Words</i>	4
<i>Using a Classroom Word Wall</i>	5
<i>Student Success</i>	6
<i>Physical Movement</i>	6
CHAPTER III.....	8
Methods and Procedures.....	8
<i>Overview</i>	8
<i>Design</i>	8
<i>Selection of Students</i>	9
<i>Validity Measures</i>	9
<i>Reliability Measures</i>	9
<i>Conclusion</i>	9
CHAPTER IV.....	10
Results and Discussion.....	10
<i>Introduction</i>	10
<i>Procedure</i>	10
<i>Variables</i>	11
<i>Hypothesis Testing</i>	12
CHAPTER V.....	13
Summary and Conclusion.....	13
<i>Introduction</i>	13
<i>Summary of Results</i>	13
<i>Conclusions</i>	19
<i>Recommendations</i>	19
References.....	21
Appendix A.....	22
Appendix B.....	23
Appendix C.....	24
Appendix D.....	25
Appendix E.....	26

Appendix F.....	27
Appendix G.....	28
Appendix H.....	29
Appendix I.....	30
A p p e n d i x	
J.....	31

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Need for the Study

There are many reasons for the need to find effective ways to teach high frequency words. First grade students have many high frequency words they need to learn because these words are seen regularly in their reading and writing. These words need to become automatic in reading and writing. Knowing these words by sight can help with reading fluency and comprehension. When a student has to stop and think about how to spell or read a high frequency word their thought process can be interrupted.

Statement of the Problem

Students have difficulty in learning the first grade high frequency words. Most of the words have no phonemic patterns. Therefore, the sounds do not match with how the words are spelled. As a result, students can have problems with reading and spelling these words. If students do not learn these words their reading and writing skills are impacted in a negative way.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to discover if using a classroom word wall is an effective way to teach high frequency words.

Statement of the Hypothesis

Using a classroom word wall will help students successfully learn high frequency words.

Definition of Terms

Word Wall – A visible display of words that are arranged in alphabetical order which support reading and writing skills. (Houle and Krogness, 2001)

High Frequency Words – Words that are seen frequently in reading and writing

which need to be known automatically by sight. (Brabham and Villaume, 2001)

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The data collection process poses one limitation in this study. Finding a way to assess student growth in their reading skills is difficult. There are no standardized tests given in first grade. No formal tests were found that could be used to assess progress with using a classroom word wall. As a result, there is a need to formulate assessments using the first grade high frequency words from the district reading curriculum.

Many students leave the classroom throughout the day for Title 1, ESL, and Special Education services. Therefore, on some days these students will not be able to participate in the word wall activities. The test results may be somewhat skewed.

This study will only be a sampling of some of the high frequency words taught.

Over the course of the year the first grade students will learn one hundred high frequency words. This study will only focus on 30 of those words.

3

The first grade students have already been exposed to a great number of high frequency words in their reading and writing experiences throughout the school year. Even though the words that will be tested have not been directly taught the students may have had some exposure to the words with their reading and writing experiences throughout the school year.

Another factor that may impact test results is the difficulty of words each week.

Some weeks may be more difficult than others. There is no way to group the words in

a manner that allows the words to get more difficult as the weeks go on.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

As will become evident, the word wall approach provides opportunities for multiple exposures to new words. It encourages students to make connections between known and unknown words. A word wall incorporates common high frequency words and facilitates reading and writing skills. (Eyraud, Giles, Koenig, and Stoller 2000)

Definition of a Word Wall

What are high frequency words? First, you will find high frequency words also called sight words or instant words. Sight words are words that good readers may instantly know without having to “figure them out.” (Fry, Kress, and Fountoukidis, 2000) Instant words are those words that should be recognized by the reader instantly for the purposes of fluent reading. (May, 1998) A definition for high frequency words are words that are seen frequently in reading and writing which need to be known automatically by sight. (Brabham and Villaume, 2001) When all is said and done the terms and definitions used are very similar. The goal is the same with each term – to learn the most common words so they are instantly recognizable. For this study the

words will be referred to as high frequency words.

High Frequency Words

There have been differing opinions on which words are the most common and which should be taught first. Many different people have put together high frequency word lists. The two most common lists used are the Dolch Word List and the Fry

5

Word List.

Although these lists do not completely agree with each other, there is remarkable consistency with the first 100 words. (May, 1998) The 100 most common words actually make up about fifty percent of the material we read. The 25 most common words make up about one-third of our written language. (Fry, Kress, and Fountoukidis, 2000)

It is necessary for students to learn these words to help with their reading skills.

We can enable our students to greatly increase their reading efficiency when we teach them to read half or more of the words they encounter in a quick and automatic manner. (Fry, Kress, and Fountoukidis, 2000)

Here is an example of a sentence a first grade student might read, “I would like to give you this present for your birthday.” A large portion of the words and meaning in this sentence revolves around knowing the high frequency words. The tough job of decoding and comprehending has been reduced to only two words – birthday and present. If the student has to stop and think about each word in the sentence meaning is lost. (May, 1998)

Using a Classroom Word Wall

One way to teach these high frequency words is by using a classroom word wall. There are many variations of this concept. The general term for a word wall is a visible display of words that are arranged in alphabetical order which support reading and writing skills. (Houle and Krogness, 2001) The types of words used vary from classroom to classroom. Some word walls are theme based, some are subject or topic specific, and others center around high frequency words.

6

Teachers have struggled to figure out the purpose and effectiveness of a word wall. (Brabham and Villaume, 2001) Word walls are meant to be a direct teaching strategy. You must “do” the word wall to be effective. It is not meant to be a way for teachers to just cover a wall in their classroom. (Cunningham and Hall 2002)

Student Success

Word walls have great potential for transferring responsibility and control for reading and writing from teacher to students. (Brabham and Villaume, 2001) When students are writing they can use the word wall as a visual aide to help in spelling words correctly. The word wall offers many exposures to the words. Students always have the words within their sight which makes the words easy to use. Children can use the word wall as a reference in daily reading and writing experiences.(Houle and Krogness, 2001)

Beginning readers and writers need reassurance from their teachers. When children learn to read and write they need to feel safe so they can put forward their

best effort. A word wall creates a secure and comfortable learning environment.

(Houle and Krogness, 2001) Students are able to feel success when they know they can spell a word correctly and read fluently.

Physical Movement

The word wall promotes active student involvement, a key to effective learning

in general. (Eyraud, Giles, Koenig, and Stoller 2000) The movement activities encourage all students to participate in learning the words. Students who otherwise

7

would sit back and not become involved are forced to participate. This facilitates the learning process for all students.

Marjorie Corso did a study on comparing developmental movement and the academic learning levels in young children. It is assumed that academic education and

movement education are separate entities. Corso found that movement is directly linked to academic education. She found that students who had difficulty crossing their midline also struggled with reading and writing. (Corso, 2000)

Corso suggests using the body to teach reading skills. Teaching new words with actions will help students learn the words. Students can spell words using their arms. Crossing the midline while spelling words out loud will help make connections between both sides of the brain. The movements will exercise the brain and help students remember the words more easily. (Corso, 2000).

CHAPTER III

Methods and Procedures

Overview

The students in this study receive reading instruction from the Scholastic reading series. There are one hundred high frequency words taught during the school year. In the past the teaching method for the high frequency words has been to practice reading the words from flash cards. The students also have practice reading the words in stories that are read using our Scholastic reading series. The success rate of learning the high frequency words by the end of the school year is somewhat low. Research indicates that students will best learn the high frequency words with a variety of experiences and activities. (Cunningham and Hall 2002)

Design

This study involved learning high frequency words using a classroom word wall. Two sets of high frequency words were used. Each set included fifteen

words. Five new words were introduced each week. The first set of words were taught using the methods that have traditionally been followed. The words were practiced by reading flash cards. The students also had practice reading the words in stories from our reading curriculum. The second set of high frequency words were taught using word wall activities.

Each week to teach the words using the word wall there were many hands-on and movement activities incorporated. Some of those activities include—cheering the words, spelling the words using tall, short, and low letters with our arms, on the back endings, on the back rhymes, snapping and clapping the letters, and writing the words.

9

Selection of Students

The study was conducted with twenty first grade students. All of the students were assessed each week on the words. The study is more complete using a whole class of students. The results can be analyzed to observe which students demonstrated the most improvements.

Validity Measures

Students will be tested three different ways on the high frequency words. The assessments will include a reading test using sentences, reading a word list, and a spelling test. These assessments will be given every week on each set of five words.

Reliability Measures

The same assessments will be given for the high frequency words that are

taught using the word wall and those taught not using the word wall. The tests will be compared to evaluate the progress students have made in learning the high frequency words.

Conclusion

This study was designed to determine if a classroom word wall would help students successfully learn high frequency words. Twenty first grade students were used. The students were assessed each week on the high frequency words taught. The assessments included two different kinds of reading tests and a spelling test. Results from all reading and spelling tests were graphed to determine the results.

CHAPTER IV

Results and Discussion

Introduction

Some students struggle to learn high frequency words and use them effectively in their reading and writing. As a result, a study was conducted to assess if a classroom word wall would help students successfully learn the high frequency words.

Procedures

This study was conducted over a six week period. Thirty high frequency words were chosen using the district reading curriculum. The words chosen were high frequency words the students are required to know by the end of first grade. Two methods were used for teaching the words - flash cards and word wall strategies. The words were divided accordingly (See Appendix A).

For the first three weeks five high frequency words were introduced and taught

each week. The words taught were practiced by reading flash cards. The students also practiced reading the words in stories from the district reading curriculum.

At the end of each week the students were given three tests to assess how well the high frequency words were learned. The assessments included reading the words from a word list, using the words in sentences, and a spelling test (See Appendices B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I). The assessments were scored and the results were placed on a graph to track the progress of each student.

For the next three weeks five high frequency words were introduced each week

using word wall strategies. The students participated in a number of activities to learn

11

the words. Each day the students would cheer the words in a variety of ways such as using different voices, using their arms to show short, tall, and low letters, and clap and snap the vowels to the spell the words (See Appendix J). A variety of games were played each week to practice the words. Another activity was for the students to close their eyes, visualize the word and spell it out loud. Then the students would write the words.

At the end of each week the words that were taught using the word wall strategies were placed on the word wall in alphabetical order. The students were then able to refer to those words when writing to be certain the word is spelled correctly.

The same assessments were given as in the first three weeks. The students

were assessed on reading a word list, using the word in a sentence, and a spelling test (See Appendices B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I) These assessments were also scored and placed on a graph.

Variables

One variable that affected the results was that this study was conducted at the end of the school year. Even though the students had not been directly taught the words that were used in this study, by the end of the year they have already been exposed to many of the high frequency words taught in first grade through their reading and writing experiences.

The difficulty of the words may have skewed the results. It is not possible to place the high frequency words into an order of increasing difficulty. Some weeks the words may have been more difficult than others. Some words may have been easier to

12

spell than to read or vice versa.

There are many students that leave the classroom throughout the day of special services such as ESL, special education, Title 1. On certain days these students may have missed some of the word wall instruction. Absences and snow days also affected the word wall activities.

At the beginning of the school year the students take a list of the high frequency words home that will be learned during the year. The students are encouraged to study the words at home for extra practice. As a result, the tester does

not know which students have practiced the words at home. This circumstance also affected the test results.

A final variable that may have affected the results was the involvement of the tester in a Master's Degree program. Many new teaching strategies were attempted throughout the school year. It is difficult to know if any of those strategies affected the test results.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis for the study was that using a classroom word wall would help students successfully learn high frequency words. Teaching the high frequency words using a classroom word wall was compared with the traditional way of teaching the words using flash cards.

The students were tested three different ways with each set of words. The results of the assessments were evaluated to see if the word wall made a difference in how well the students learned the words.

CHAPTER V

Summary and Conclusion

Introduction

In this study, students were tested on thirty high frequency words. The first words were taught using flash cards. The second set of words were taught using word wall strategies. The students participated in various word wall activities to learn the words. At the end of each week the students were given three assessments which included a spelling test, using the words in sentences, and reading a word list. The

results from these assessments were placed on a graph and the scores were evaluated.

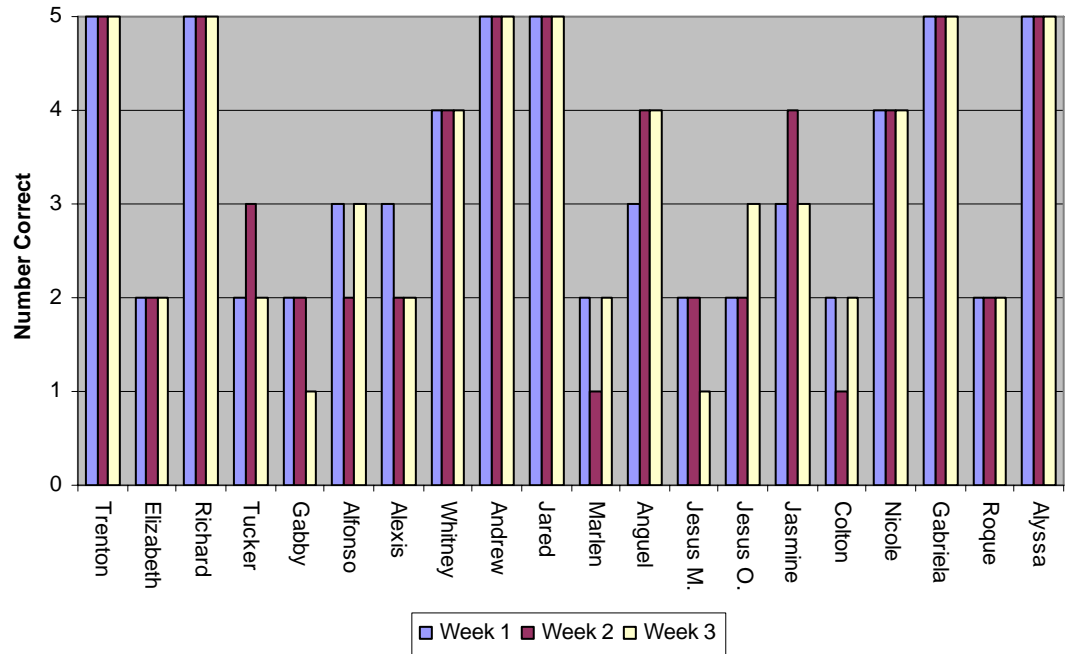
Summary of Results

Results from the word list assessment showed growth with using the word wall

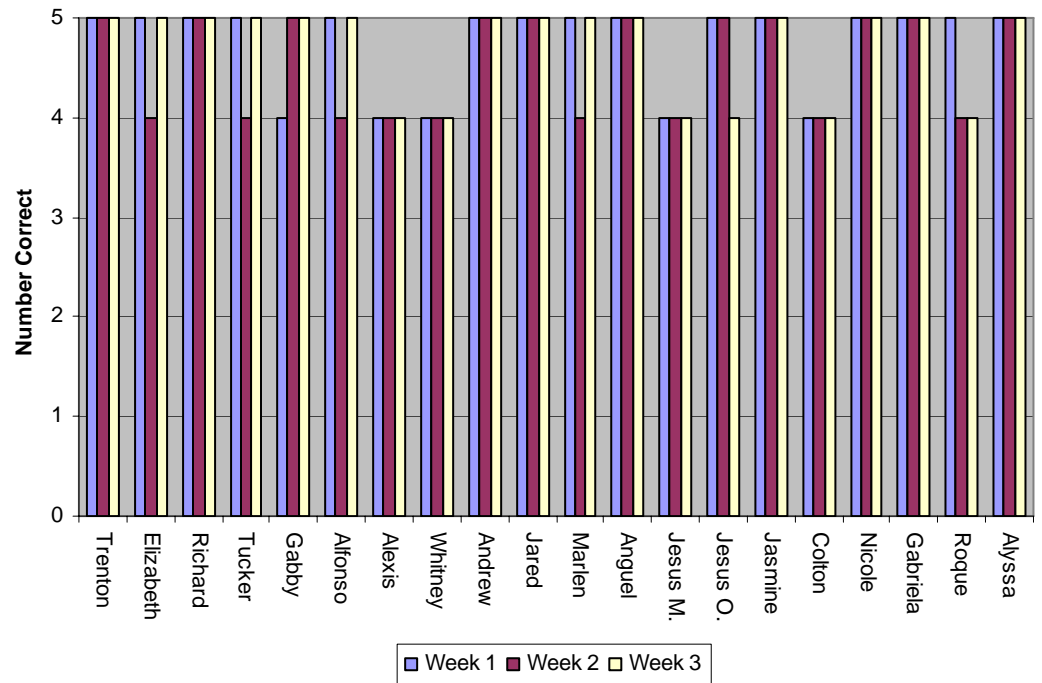
when compared to the words taught without using the word wall strategies. There is fluctuation in scores because of the difference in the level of difficulty in the words week to week. Overall this assessment did not show as much growth as did the other two assessments that were given, the sentences test and the spelling test, because the words were not used in context. It is more difficult to read a word in isolation than to read it in a sentence. The students who showed the most growth were the students that

were struggling in reading. No change was made in the students who were already progressing at an average or above average rate of learning. (See the charts on page 14.)

Word Test Without Word Wall

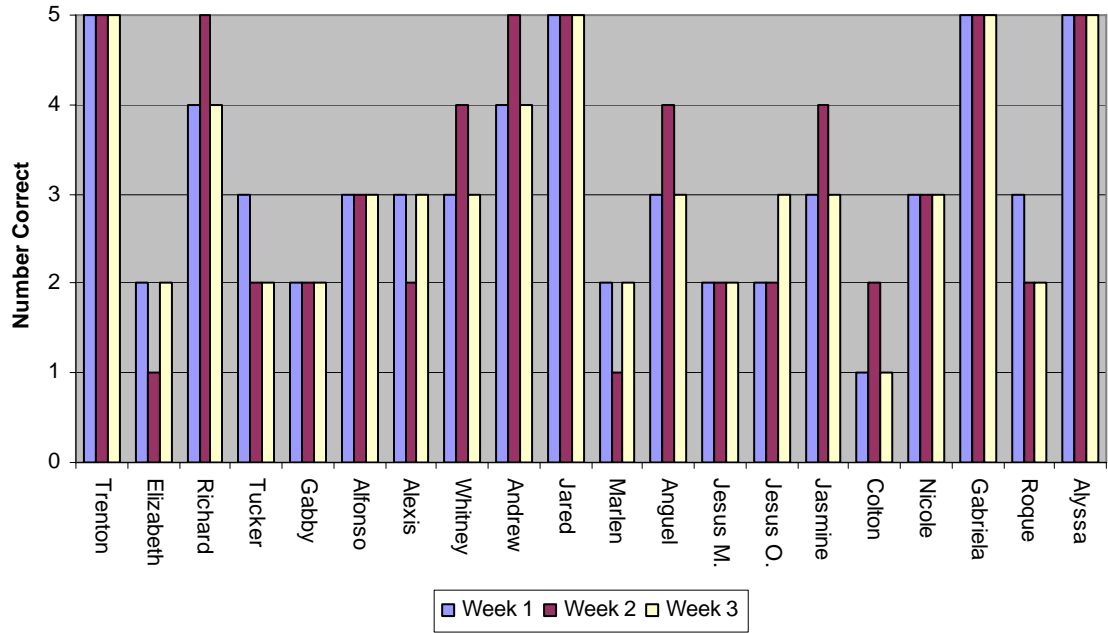


Word Test Using Word Wall

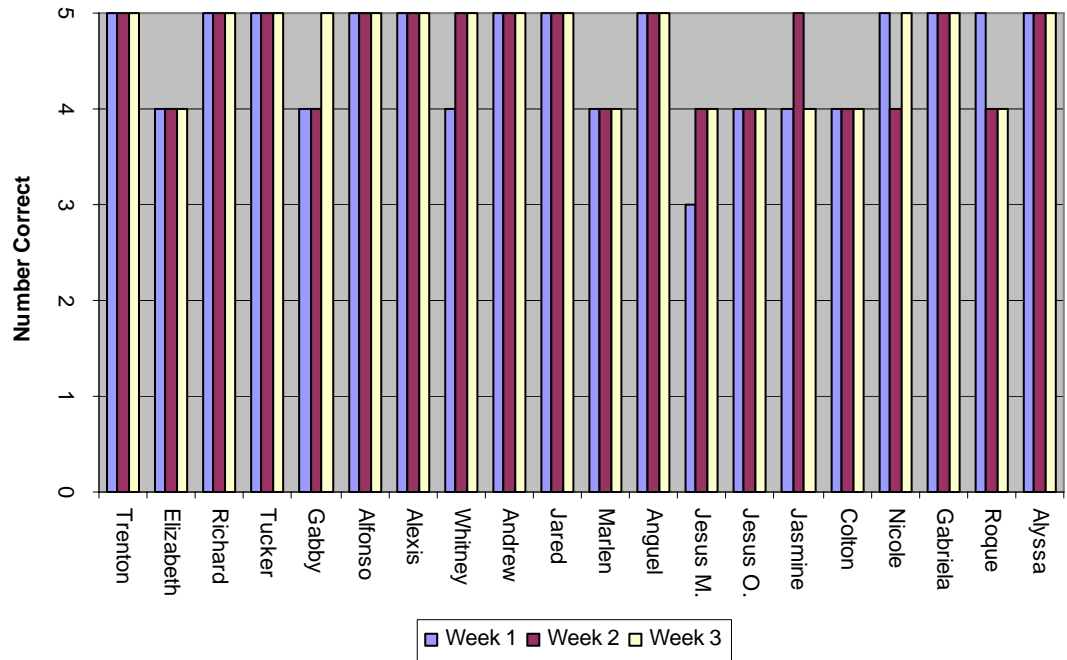


Students were assessed on their ability to read a sentence and choose the word that best fits in the sentence using the high frequency words they had learned. Results demonstrated growth when using the word wall compared to words that were taught without using word wall strategies. For this assessment the students could use context clues to read the word wall words. As a result, this test illustrated more growth among a larger number of the students compared to the words test. However, the students who were struggling in reading showed the most growth. (See the charts on page 16.)

Sentences Test Without Word Wall

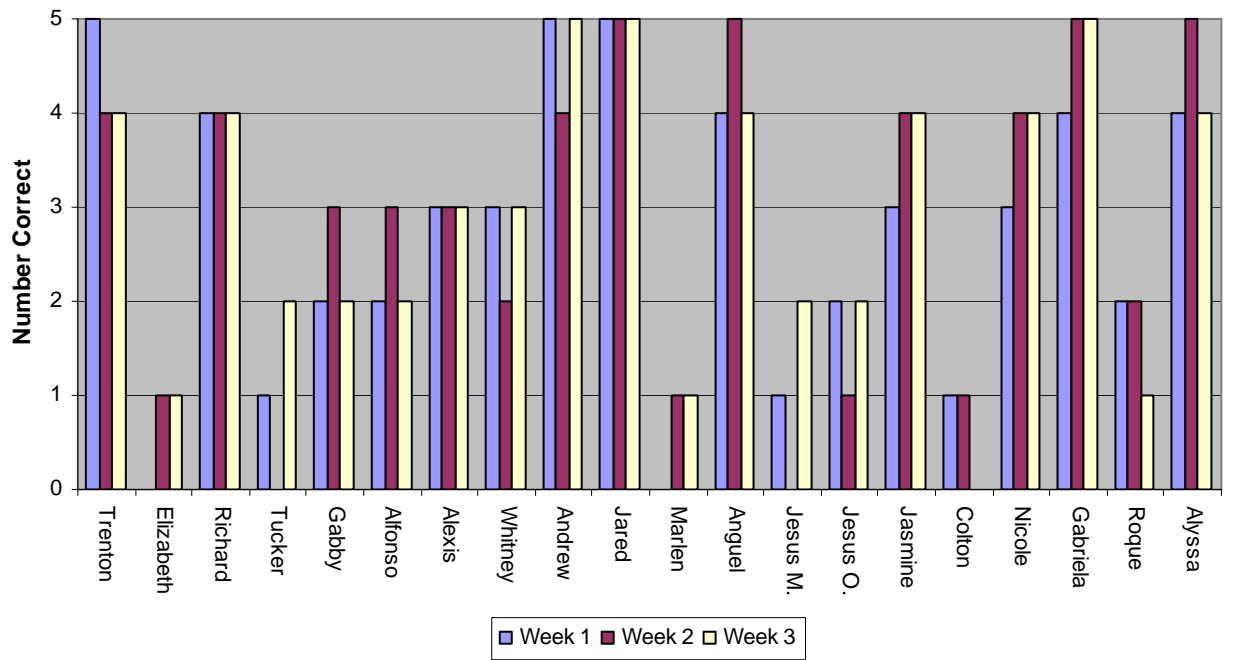


Sentences Test Using Word Wall

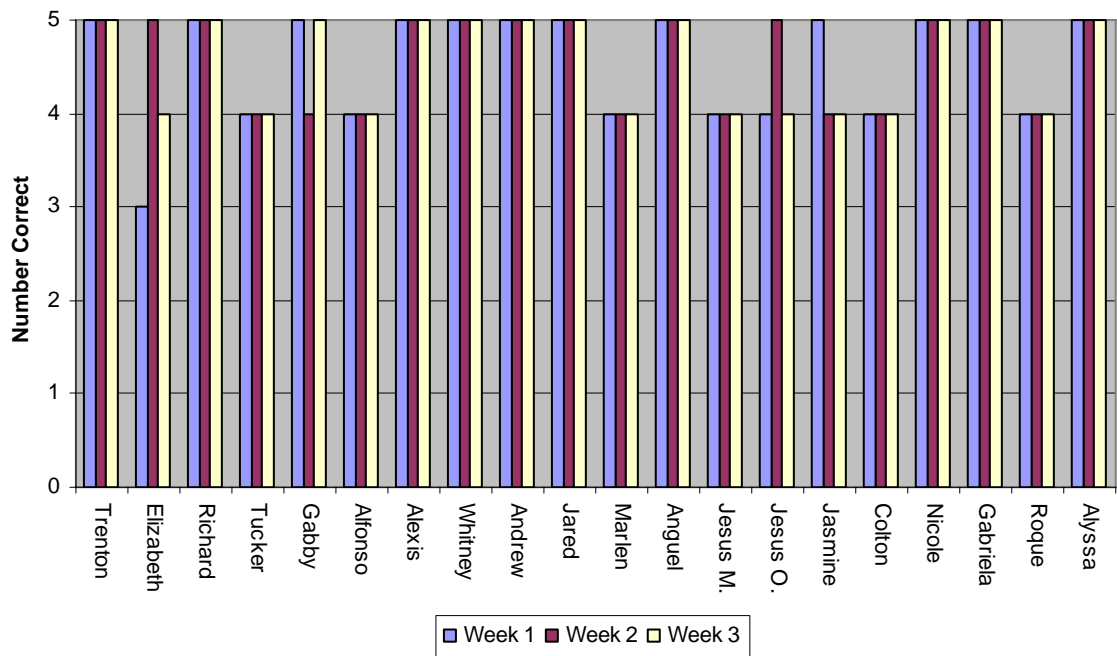


The final assessment given on each set of words was a spelling test. This test showed the most growth compared to the word assessment and the sentence assessment. When practicing the words with flash cards the students had no spelling practice during the week to prepare for the test. Using the word wall strategies and writing the words each day helped the students tremendously in learning how to spell the words. Again, the struggling readers gained the most on this assessment after using the word wall strategies. Even some of the students who were progressing at an average or above average rate demonstrated significant improvement in learning how to spell the words. (See the charts on page 18.)

Spelling Test Without Word Wall



Spelling Test Using Word Wall



Conclusions

Using a classroom word wall proved to be successful in teaching students high frequency words. The students who showed the most gains were the struggling readers. Students performing at an average or above average rate of learning did not show as much growth. The spelling assessment proved to be the most successful. After using the word wall activities the students were more successful in spelling the high frequency words correctly. There is a fluctuation in scores each week on all of the assessments due to the fact that some weeks the words were more difficult than others.

Another factor that may have influenced the results was student interest. The students seemed not to put as much effort into learning the words when reading from flash cards as when learning the words using the word wall activities. The word wall activities were much more fun because the students were moving and able to be active in their learning.

Recommendations

The growth demonstrated on the assessments where word wall activities were used to learn high frequency words gives proof that these activities should continue in the classroom. The students showed more excitement for learning the words when participating in the word wall activities. As a result, the tester feels this is a great way to get the students involved and active in their learning.

It is recommended that if the study is conducted again it should take place earlier in the school year over a longer period of time using a larger group of words.

This would eliminate exposure to many of the high frequency words and possibly give

20

more accurate results. Reassessment of words would be done after a period of time to evaluate if the students have retained the words learned using word wall activities. An

interest inventory would be given to discover how the students feel about the activities.

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Appendix A

High Frequency Word List Without the Word Wall

<u>Week 1</u>	<u>Week 2</u>	<u>Week</u>
1. off	1. asked	1. came
2. why	2. before	2.
through		
3. now	3. how	3. little
4. down	4. first	4. from
5. this	5. saw	5. when

High Frequency Word List Using the Word Wall

<u>Week 1</u>	<u>Week 2</u>	<u>Week 3</u>
1. next	1. want	1.
something		
2. more	2. must	2. give
3. which	3. would	3. good
4. girl	4. where	4. soon
5. grow	5. put	5. could

Appendix B

Word List Test Without the Word Wall

Name_____

Week 1

1. _____ off
2. _____ why
3. _____ now
4. _____ down
5. _____ this

Week 2

1. _____ asked
2. _____ before
3. _____ how
4. _____ first
5. _____ saw

Week 3

1. _____ came
2. _____ from
3. _____ through
4. _____ little
5. _____ when

Appendix C

Word List Test Using the Word Wall

Name_____

Week 11. _____ next
_____ something

2. _____ more

3. _____ girl

4. _____ which

5. _____ grow

Week 2

1. _____ want

2. _____ must

3. _____ put

4. _____ would

5. _____ where

Week 3

1.

2. _____ give

3. _____ good

4. _____ soon

5. _____ could

Name_____

- Who is _____ in line?
a. their b. next c. come
- May I have _____ milk, please?
a. more b. all c. now
- _____ one do you like better?
a. Make b. Which c. What
- I met a _____ named Sara.
a. girl b. your c. some

5. The flowers _____ in the garden.

a. thing

b. very

c. grow

26

Appendix E

Sentences Test Using the Word Wall – Week 2

Name_____

1. I _____ to go to the park.

a. why

b. want

c. you

2. We _____ be home by five.

a. must

b. one

c. down

3. He _____ like to read a book.

a. would

b. have

c. looks

4. _____ are you going after school?

a. That

b. Where

c. She

5. _____ your shoes by the door.

a. Said

b. With

c. Put

27

Appendix F

Sentences Test Using the Word Wall – Week 3

Name_____

1. There is _____ in my shoe

a. something

b. first

c. over

2. I will _____ this present to my friend.

a. who

b. little

c. give

3. This pizza is _____.

a. out

b. good

c. this

4. _____ Christmas will be here.

a. Big

b. Soon

c. With

5. She _____ play outside for recess.

a. could

b. they

c. under

28

Appendix G

Sentences Test Without the Word Wall – Week 1

Name _____

1. He took _____ his coat.

a. and

b. off

c. can

2. _____ did you put that away?

a. Why

b. My

c. Not

3. I can go home _____.

a. now

b. like

c. see

4. We went _____ the slide at the park.

a. be

b. have

c. down

5. _____ is my birthday cake.

a. That

b. This

c. Do

Appendix H

Sentences Test Without the Word Wall – Week 2

Name_____

1. I _____ for help.

a. red

b. asked

c. my

2. John went to music _____ lunch.

a. before

b. like

c. look

3. _____ did you do that?

a. Said

b. Have

c. How

4. He put my socks on _____.

a. first

b. see

c. will

5. The boy _____ a bird in the nest.
- a. be b. what c. saw

30

Appendix I

Sentences Test Without the Word Wall – Week 3

Name _____

1. The children _____ to school.
- a. did b. with c. came
2. This is _____ my friend.
- a. from b. she c. they
3. The car went _____ the tunnel.
- a. not b. what c. through
4. The _____ baby was crying.
- a. down b. little c. have

5. _____ will you come to my house?

a. When

b. Looks

c. Over

31

Appendix J

Word Wall Cheers

1. Monster Voice
2. Robot Voice
3. Mouse Voice
4. Snap and Clap – snap the vowels and clap the consonants
5. Disco Fever
6. Whisper and Shout – whisper the vowels, shout the consonants
7. Up and Down – crouch down for vowels, stand up for consonants
8. SLOOOWWW – spell each word very slowly
9. Opera Style
10. Blast Off – start in a crouched position, straighten a little each time you say a letter, and jump at the end to say the word

THE EFFECTS OF REPEATED GUIDED ORAL READING ON THE READING
FLUENCY OF FIRST GRADE STUDENTS

by

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A capstone submitted to the

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The Effects of Repeated Guided Oral Reading on the Reading Fluency of First Grade Students

Capstone directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman

Abstract

The current focus on reading fluency has led to the development of many instructional techniques for building the reading fluency of young students. This study examined the effects of repeated guided oral reading on the reading fluency of first grade students.

A class of first grade students participated in flexible guided reading groups in which they read leveled texts with an adult. After having a text introduced in a small group, modeled by an adult reader, and reading it together as a group several times, most of the students in the class then read each of these texts one time aloud to a competent reader and three times independently. A small group of students read each text three times aloud to a competent reader and one time independently. Fluency assessments were given approximately twice a month to measure how many words students read correctly per minute and to determine students' reading accuracy.

The students in the group that had the opportunity to read each text aloud three times to a competent reader scored significantly better on the reading fluency assessments than the rest of the class that read each text three times independently. Both the number of words read correctly per minute and the reading accuracy were better for these students than the rest of the class.

While reading repeatedly aloud helped to increase students' fluency scores, the practice was very time-consuming and required much individual adult interaction with the students. This practice might be best reserved for use with struggling readers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I: INTRODUCTION 1

Need for the Study	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Purpose of the Study	2
Statement of the Hypothesis	2
Definition of Terms.....	2
Variables	3
Limitations and Delimitations of the Study	3

II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE 5

Fluency and Automaticity.....	6
Three Dimensions of Reading Fluency.....	6
The Importance of Fluency	7
Assessing Reading Fluency	7
Strategies to Build Fluency	7
Repeated Readings.....	8
Oral Reading and Silent Reading.....	9

III: METHODS AND PROCEDURES 12

Overview.....	12
Research Design.....	12
Subjects	13
Instruments.....	13

Validity and Reliability Measures	14
Procedures	14
Conclusion	16
IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	17
Words Correct Per Minute	17
Reading Accuracy	18
V: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	21
Summary	21
Conclusions	21
Recommendations	22
REFERENCES	24
APPENDIX	
A: Fluency Assessment Procedure	27
B: Reading Log 1	28
C: Reading Log 2	29

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Need for the Study

With the focus in education today on measurable gains, high stakes testing, and accountability in the classroom, reading fluency assessments have become a popular way to measure students' reading proficiency. While reading fluency has been a neglected component of reading instruction in the last few decades (Allington, 1983), it is becoming recognized as an important link between decoding and comprehension (Rasinski, 2003). The National Reading Panel Report (2000), which assessed research-based reading instruction and the effectiveness of teaching approaches, identified fluency as an important component of reading instruction. With the No Child Left Behind legislation and individual state standards for reading instruction being imposed, teachers need to address fluency instruction in the classroom. First grade students are expected to be able to read a text aloud with accuracy and emerging fluency according to the Minnesota Academic Standards for Language Arts. With this increased emphasis on reading fluency, it becomes necessary to determine which types of reading instruction and practice most positively influence reading fluency of primary aged students.

Statement of the Problem

Students' reading proficiency is measured, in part, by their ability to read fluently. Because the emphasis in reading instruction for many first grade students tends to be on decoding and word recognition skills, their reading fluency is deficient. Practices that are the most effective for building the reading fluency of first graders need to be examined. While engaging in independent reading time is a common

activity in most primary classrooms, perhaps reading aloud to a competent reader would be more beneficial to students than reading by themselves, even though they might not have as many opportunities to read because of time and adult volunteer constraints.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine which practices are the most effective for building the reading fluency of first graders. Specifically, it examined if reading aloud to a competent reader was more beneficial for students than reading independently.

Statement of the Hypothesis

Reading fluency scores will improve more for first grade students who engage in repeated guided oral reading than for students who engage in repeated independent reading. Reading fluency scores included both words read correct per minute and accuracy scores.

Definition of Terms

Repeated guided oral reading: The practice of having a student read the same text several times aloud to a competent reader. The competent reader was able to give help and feedback to the student.

Repeated independent reading: The practice of having a student read the same text several times independently.

Competent readers: In this study, they included the classroom teacher, parent volunteers, and high school helpers.

Words correct per minute: This was calculated by counting the total number of words a student read in a minute and subtracting the errors.

Errors: Substitutions, omissions, and additions were counted as errors. Repetitions and self-corrections were not counted as errors.

Accuracy: This was determined by dividing the number of words read correctly per minute by the total number of words read.

Variables

The independent variable of this study was the repeated guided oral reading strategy. The control group engaged in repeated independent reading instead of repeated guided oral reading. The dependent variable was the fluency scores of the students including both words correct per minute and accuracy scores. Control variables of this study included the students being in the same classroom with the same teacher and the students receiving all the same reading instruction except for the repeated guided oral reading component. Moderator variables that might have affected the outcome of the study included students' individual differences and the amount of parental involvement in each student's reading practice.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study compared fluency scores of students in the repeated guided oral reading group to the fluency scores of students in the repeated independent reading group. While every effort was made to match similar students in each group so that the groups would be comparable, individual differences in students may have accounted for some of the differences in the results. It was impossible to control for students' background, academic needs, and parental involvement, all of which may

have had an impact upon the results of this project. Due to time constraints, the length of the project may have been a limiting factor in how the fluency scores were impacted. The relatively small number of students (23) included in this study was also a limitation. The experimental group included just five students. Because of these limitations of student individuality, time, and sample size, the results may not generalize to all first graders.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Reading fluency is a complex skill to define. Researchers have varying definitions of what constitutes fluent reading. Fluent reading is not necessarily just fast reading (Callella, 2003). While measuring the reading rate of students is one way to assess reading fluency, this should not be the only measure. Along with reading quickly, fluency also includes accuracy, efficiency, and reading with appropriate meaningful expression (Rasinski, 1989; Rasinski, 2003). Fluent readers focus on phrases that help them construct meaning from the text (Callella, 2003).

Laberge and Samuels (1974) described the reading process as consisting of two basic parts. The printed words must be decoded and the decoded words then need to be comprehended. Both of these parts are dependent on selective attention to the text (Samuels, Schermer, & Reinking, 1992). Of course, there are many complexities within these parts which consist of numerous prerequisite skills and competencies, but decoding and comprehension have been the main components in the teaching of reading. Fluency, however, has begun to be recognized as “a bridge” (Rasinski, 2003, p. 19) between decoding and comprehension.

Fluency has long been recognized as a link to successful reading dating back to 19th century reading research in which the development of fluent reading was compared to the development of other psychomotor skills such as playing sports and making music (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002). The focus on reading fluency as an important skill, however, has been sporadic in the research (Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001). In 1983, Richard Allington wrote that fluency was the most neglected aspect of reading instruction. While it has long been recognized as an important aspect of

reading proficiently, it is only recently that there has been a focus on the fluency of beginning readers by developing instructional techniques to help build fluency and researching their effectiveness (Rasinski, 1990). Wolf and Katzir-Cohen (2001) believe the recent attention to reading fluency can be attributed to several factors including the fact that research has not addressed the needs of students who don't respond to phonological-based interventions and increased knowledge of the sources of fluency development.

Fluency and Automaticity

Most researchers point to the role of automaticity when discussing fluency. Automaticity is the point at which decoding becomes automatic without having to attend to the decoding process. For beginning readers, a great deal of attention is focused on decoding each word or word part. As Samuels, Schermer, and Reinking (1992) state, beginning readers overtax memory and attention by having to focus on both decoding and comprehension, thus making reading plodding and laborious. Fluent readers, on the other hand, are able to focus on the whole word which makes reading easier and faster. They group words together to help make meaning (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Because fluent readers do not need to focus so much on decoding, comprehension and decoding can occur at the same time (Samuel et al., 1992).

Three Dimensions of Reading Fluency

Timothy Rasinski (2004) describes three dimensions of reading fluency. Decoding accuracy is the first. Readers must be able to decode words easily with few mistakes. Automatic processing is the second dimension. Readers need to be able to focus on the meaning of the text instead of the decoding of words. The third dimension is prosodic

reading. Prosodic readers break the text into meaningful units. Fluent readers read quickly, accurately, with expression, and with a sense of phrasing and emphasis showing that they understand the meaning of the text.

The Importance of Fluency

Fluency is a critical component of reading instruction (Worthy & Broadus, 2001). Achieving fluency allows a student to attend more to comprehending the meaning of the text. When students are expected to read independently, those who are not yet fluent readers not only have a difficult time understanding and doing class work, but they also tend to avoid reading because it is not an enjoyable activity for them (Worthy & Broadus, 2001). These students get caught in a vicious cycle because they don't get the necessary practice to become more fluent. "Reading is a skill – and the more you use it, the better you get at it. Conversely, the less you use it, the more difficult it is" (Trelease, 1979, p. 107).

Assessing Reading Fluency

Reading fluency assessment should not focus simply on reading rate (Callella, 2003; Rasinski, 2004). While finding the reading rate of students by having the students do timed readings measures one aspect of fluent reading, other aspects of fluency should also be assessed. Students' ability to decode words can be assessed by calculating the accuracy of the reading. Assessing the prosodic dimension of reading can be done using a rubric that measures phrasing, smoothness, expression, and pace (Rasinski, 2004). All of these assessments can be done by listening to students read short grade-level passages.

Strategies to Build Fluency

Because fluency is so integral to comprehension, it is important to focus on building fluency in the classroom. There are many different strategies that can be used in the classroom for developing oral reading fluency in students. Modeling fluent reading is one of the most basic and most important when working with primary aged children. Students need to have a good sense of what fluent reading sounds like and how fluent readers use their voices to make meaning from the text (Rasinski, 2004). With good models of fluent reading, students develop an awareness of the importance of fluent reading (Rasinski and Padack, 2001). Strategies such as repeated readings, reader's theater, choral reading, tape-assisted reading, partner reading, poetry parties, fluency development lessons, neurological impress method, listening-while-reading, and cloze reading (Blau, 1999; Armbruster et al., 2001; Rasinski, 2003, Rasinski, 1989; Rasinski, 1990; Homan, Klesius, & Hite, 1993) have all been written about as ways to help students build reading fluency. One of the most researched and effective instructional methods aimed at increasing reading fluency is that of repeated readings (Rasinski, 1990).

Repeated Readings

Research has found that repeated readings improve fluency in students (Homan et al., 1993; Rasinski, 1990; Samuels, 1979). Samuels, Schermer, and Reinking (1992) state that exposure to repeated reading and time to practice with easy reading materials will help students become automatic at decoding and better readers. The repeated reading technique emphasizes practice and repetition so that automaticity is achieved. This technique involves rereading a short interesting passage until fluency is achieved. This method is then repeated with a new passage

(Samuels, 1979). Repeated reading helps students achieve the necessary automaticity for fluency (Samuels et al., 1992). Because the decoding of the text becomes easier with each rereading, more attention is available for comprehension (Samuels, 1979). The repeated reading method not only increases a student's fluency for that particular passage, it also improves the decoding, reading rate, and prosodic reading of new material (Homan et al., 1993; Rasinski, 2004).

A drawback to using repeated readings is a possible loss of student interest and motivation in the reading material (Homan et al., 1993; Rasinski, 1990). To make sure that students remain motivated to read, the repeated reading technique should not be overused and it should not be used with readers who are already fluent (Samuels et al., 1992). To be most effective, this technique should be used in conjunction with other fluency building strategies (Homan et al., 1993).

Additionally, the repeated reading technique is quite labor intensive for the teacher. Time must be spent listening to students read orally. Because the repeated reading technique requires teacher time, a limited resource in most classrooms due to instructional demands, students may not get as much reading practice as they could get from other kinds of reading practice such as independent reading.

Oral Reading and Silent Reading

While oral reading has a long history in education, there was a shift to an emphasis on silent reading at the beginning of the 20th century (Rasinski, 2003; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). Silent reading became the preferred method of reading instruction because it was determined to be a more authentic form of reading. Silent reading also focuses readers' attention to the meaning of text rather than the oral

production of text. In addition, silent reading allows students to read more texts and spend more time reading because they don't need to wait for their turn to read or someone to read aloud to (Rasinski, 2003). Researchers have noted that getting students to spend more time reading is a useful approach to building fluency.

Increasing the time spent reading helps students become better readers (Armbruster et al., 2001; Samuels et al., 1992; Trelease, 1979). Because of this research, independent reading in the classroom is a popular activity. Independent reading is called many different things including SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) and DEAR (Drop Everything And Read). These programs are generally implemented for the purpose of encouraging students to read on their own. Students read high interest books silently and independently. By having students read independently in the classroom, the teacher is not required to listen to students and students may get more reading time and practice. The drawback is that they don't get the modeling, guidance, or feedback from the teacher.

Besides providing feedback for the reader, oral reading also builds confidence, creates community, strengthens decoding skills, creates an enjoyable experience, and provides practice for many daily activities such as giving speeches, singing songs, telling jokes, and giving announcements (Rasinski, 2003). With a limited amount of time in the day, it needs to be determined if the best use of adult resources in the classroom is listening to students read orally. If the technique of repeated guided oral reading helps students make significant gains in fluency, then it would seem to be an appropriate reading technique to employ in the classroom. If no greater fluency gains are made by students engaged in repeated guided oral reading than by students

engaged in repeated independent reading, then it wouldn't be the best use of limited resources to focus adult attention on listening to students read aloud. Their guidance could, perhaps, be better utilized elsewhere in the curriculum. This study investigated the different effects of these two reading practices on the reading fluency of students.

CHAPTER III: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Overview

This study examined the effects of repeated guided oral reading on the reading fluency of first grade students. All of the 23 first grade students in this class participated in flexible guided reading groups in which they read leveled texts with an adult. After having a text introduced in a small group, modeled by an adult reader, and reading it together as a group several times, most of the students in the class then read each of these texts one time aloud to a competent reader and three times independently. A small group of five students read each text three times aloud to a competent reader (repeated guided oral reading) and one time independently. Fluency assessments were given approximately twice a month to measure how many words students read correctly per minute and to determine students' reading accuracy.

Research Design

This study was a simple experiment that looked at the effects of the independent variable, the repeated guided oral reading strategy, on students' reading fluency scores. The fluency scores of the five students in the repeated guided oral reading group (Group A) were compared to the fluency scores of the students in the control group (Group B). The control group consisted of the rest of the class who read texts more times independently rather than orally to a competent reader. The students in both groups read each text the same number of times. Group A read each text three times aloud to a competent reader and one time independently. Group B read each text one time aloud to a competent reader and three times independently.

Both the number of words read correctly per minute and the reading accuracy scores were assessed when conducting fluency assessments.

Subjects

The participants of this study included 23 six and seven year olds in a first grade class. The small town community in which this school is located is predominantly Caucasian and middle class. The ethnic make-up of the class was predominantly Caucasian. The two students with Hispanic backgrounds were average students who did not qualify for ESL assistance. None of the students in this study received any special education services. All of the students in the class were grouped according to their previous fluency scores, curriculum-based assessment scores in phonics and high frequency word recognition, and the classroom teacher's impressions of their reading proficiency. One student from each of these groups (five in all) was randomly chosen as a representative sample of the class to be in the repeated guided oral reading experimental group. The other 18 students were the control group.

Instruments

Students' reading fluency was assessed about twice a month using the fluency procedure (Appendix A) with material that the students had not previously seen. Both the number of words read correctly per minute and the reading accuracy were assessed. The fluency assessments used were from leveled classroom reading materials that corresponded to the Houghton Mifflin Invitations reading series that was used for reading instruction in the classroom. The texts that the students used for the repeated guided oral reading and the repeated independent reading were leveled

books used in flexible small reading groups. Students from both the experimental and control groups read the same texts.

Validity and Reliability Measures

The internal validity of this study was strong because the only difference in reading instruction that the two groups received was the number of times that the students read the text aloud to a competent reader. Individual student differences in reading ability and the amount of reading help that each student received at home were not able to be standardized, however. The students were from the same classroom and taught by the same teacher. The external validity was difficult to measure because the results from this particular group of students may not generalize to other students. Comparing the results of this group of students to other students in other classes and other schools may not be applicable. The study needs to be replicated with other students and classes in order to ascertain external validity. The reliability measures used include having the same person conduct all of the fluency assessments. The procedure was scripted and used consistently as written in Appendix A.

Procedures

All of the students in the class participated in a flexible small group reading time in which they read leveled books with a competent reader. The leveled texts that the small groups read included fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections. After these texts were modeled by a competent reader, discussed, and read together by the group several times, the students were then required to read the text independently and to a competent reader. For this study, the five students in the repeated guided oral reading

group (Group A) were given the task to read each text from their small group reading time three times aloud to a competent reader and one time independently. Students who were in the repeated independent reading group (Group B) were given the task to read each text from their small group reading time one time aloud to a competent reader and three times independently. Students recorded how many times they read each text on a Reading Log (Appendices B and C) and either had the competent reader initial after it was read aloud, or initialed it themselves after it was read independently. Students were given time during the school day to work on their Reading Logs. Competent readers were available during this time to listen to students read aloud. Students frequently needed to wait for a turn to read aloud because the competent readers were listening to other students. If a student needed to wait to read, he or she was engaged in other literacy activities in the classroom. Other than being assigned to the repeated guided oral reading group or the repeated independent reading group, students had no other differences in their classroom reading instruction.

Fluency assessments were administered by the classroom teacher twice a month using the Fluency Procedure (Appendix A). The material that the students were assessed on corresponded to the Houghton Mifflin Invitations reading curriculum that was used in the classroom. The students had not previously seen this material. Both words read correctly per minute and accuracy scores were assessed. A total of nine fluency assessments were administered in the five month duration of this study.

Conclusion

This study measured the effects of repeated guided oral reading on the reading fluency of students by having a small sample of students engage more in repeated guided oral reading than repeated independent reading. Students either read a text three times aloud to a competent reader and one time independently, or one time aloud to a competent reader and three times independently. The reading fluency of each student was then assessed according to how many words were read correctly per minute and the accuracy of the reading.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of repeated guided oral reading on the reading fluency of first grade students. Reading fluency was measured both by calculating the number of words students read correctly per minute and by calculating the reading accuracy of the timed reading.

Words Correct Per Minute

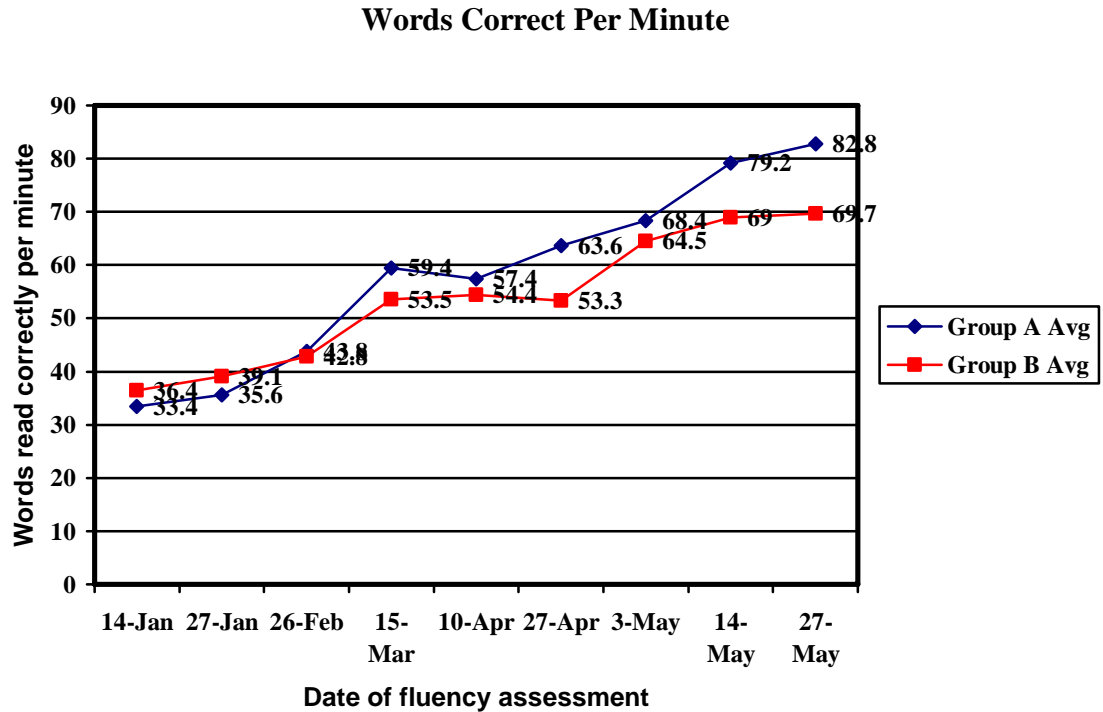
Nine fluency assessments were given in the five month duration of this study. The mean score for the experimental group (Group A) was 58.2 words read correctly per minute with a standard deviation of 17.7. The median of the scores of this group was 59.4. The mean score for the control group (Group B) was 53.6 words read correctly per minute with a standard deviation of 12.4. The median of the scores of this group was 53.5. Table 4.1 shows the mean, standard deviations, and median values for each group. Figure 4.1 shows each group's average of words read correctly per minute for each fluency assessment taken.

Table 4.1

Words Read Correctly Per Minute

	Group A	Group B
Mean	58.2	53.6
Standard Deviation	17.7	12.4
Median	59.4	53.5

Figure 4.1



A t-test analysis of the data showed that the t value was -2.32 with 8 degrees of freedom. The p value was 0.049. The confidence interval for the mean scores was 95%. The average increase in words read correctly per minute from the January 14 assessment to the May 27 assessment for Group A was 49.4. The average increase for Group B for the same time period was 33.3. Each of the five students in Group A exceeded the average increase of the rest of the class. The lowest increase in words read correctly per minute in Group A was 37.0, which is 3.7 more words than the Group B average.

Reading Accuracy

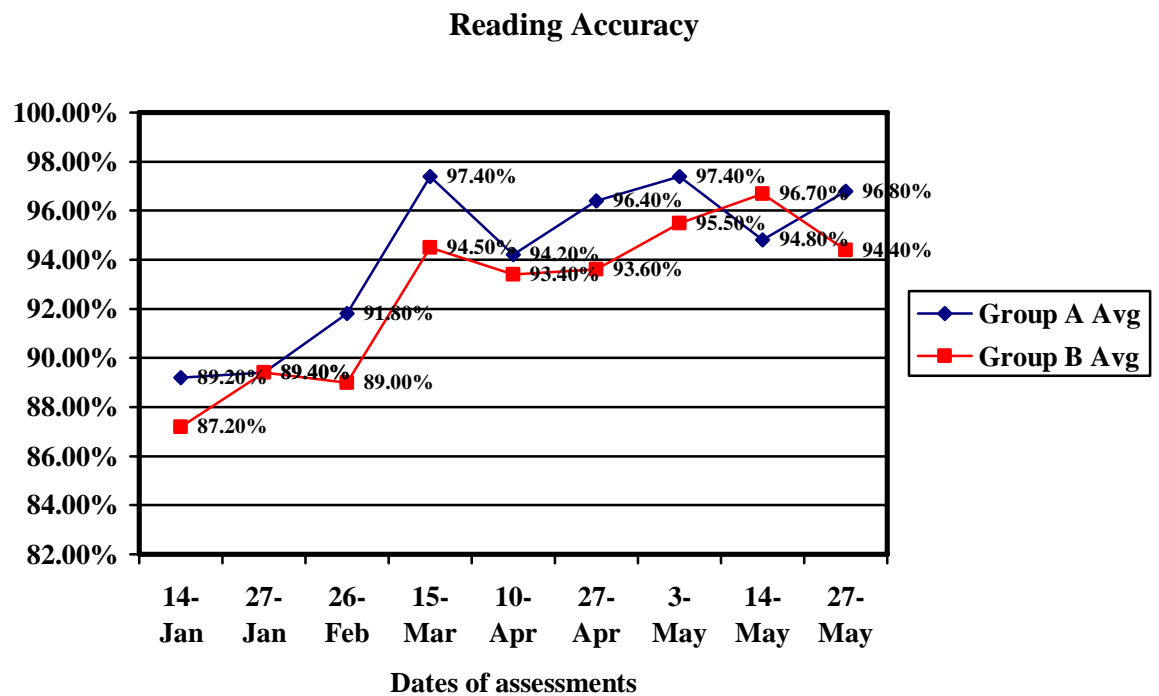
The mean accuracy score for the experimental group (Group A) was 94.2% with a standard deviation of 3.28. The median of the scores of this group was 94.8%. The mean accuracy score for the control group (Group B) was 92.6% with a standard

deviation of 3.28. The median of the scores of this group was 93.6%. Table 4.2 shows the mean, standard deviations, and median values for the reading accuracy of each group. Figure 4.2 shows each group's average of reading accuracy scores for each fluency assessment taken.

Table 4.2
Reading Accuracy

	Group A	Group B
Mean	94.2	92.6
Standard Deviation	3.28	3.28
Median	94.8	93.6

Figure 4.2



A t-test analysis of the data showed that the t value was -2.83 with 8 degrees of freedom. The p value was 0.022. The confidence interval for the mean scores was 95%. The average increase for Group A from the first assessment on January 14 to the last assessment on May 27 was 7.6. The average increase for Group B for this same time period was 7.2. The average reading accuracy scores for Group A were above 95%, which is generally considered the independent reading level, on four out of the nine assessments. The average reading accuracy scores for Group B were above 95% on only two out of the nine assessments.

The results for both measures of fluency (words read correctly per minute and accuracy) were found to be statistically significant in that the p value for each was less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis (that using the repeated guided oral reading strategy has no effect on reading fluency scores) is rejected. The hypothesis that the practice of repeated guided oral reading positively affects the reading fluency of first graders is accepted.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of repeated guided oral reading on the reading fluency of first grade students. By examining the number of words read correctly per minute and the reading accuracy of students who had more opportunities to read repeatedly aloud to competent readers, the significance of the effects can be determined. From the results, we can conclude that the students who participated in the repeated guided oral reading group scored statistically significantly better on the reading fluency measures than the rest of the class who read more independently. Both the number of words read correctly and the reading accuracy scores were higher for the experimental group than the rest of the class. Having students repeatedly read texts aloud helped them make significant improvements in their reading fluency.

Conclusions

Repeated guided oral reading is a worthwhile practice that helps improve students' reading fluency. Having students read aloud to a competent reader who is available to give help and feedback helps students read more words correctly per minute and with greater accuracy. While students may be able to read more texts when reading independently because they do not need to wait to read to someone, this is not as beneficial as being able to read to a competent reader. The practice of reading aloud to a competent reader who is able to provide guidance and feedback helps to increase students' reading fluency. The students in this class enjoyed reading aloud. They wanted to read their text to the competent readers. They liked having an

audience to read to and appreciated the individual attention. When students discussed how they felt about reading aloud and reading independently, most stated that they would rather read aloud to someone else than read by themselves. When asked why, they reported that it was more fun to read to someone and that they could get help with the words. Because of the limitations of student individuality, time, and sample size, however, these results may not generalize to all first grade students.

Recommendations

While the practice of repeated guided oral reading helped to increase students' reading fluency scores, there are some disadvantages to using this method in the classroom. The time that it takes for students to repeatedly read a text aloud to someone is hard to find in a typical classroom. Finding enough competent readers to listen to students read is also difficult. Because of the time and volunteer constraints involved, repeated guided oral reading might be best used for struggling readers

The implementation of a repeated guided oral reading component was certainly a beneficial experience for the students. For most students, however, other forms of repeated reading that do not require as much individual attention from a competent reader would be more advantageous. Strategies such as reader's theater, choral reading, and poetry parties would give students authentic purposes for repeated reading and do not require as much individual attention from the teacher.

One area that this study did not address is the prosodic dimension of reading fluency. While students' automatic processing and accuracy were both measured, there was no measure of students' expression or phrasing in their oral reading. It would be desirable to measure this aspect of reading fluency. A rubric of different

prosodic reading elements including phrasing, smoothness, expression, and pace, such as the one that Timothy Rasinski (2004) developed, would be appropriate.

The repeated guided oral reading strategy is perhaps most beneficial for use with those students who truly struggle with reading fluency. The results of this study have shown that this strategy is effective. By focusing on the students who need fluency improvement the most, the most effective use of teacher and adult attention can be achieved.

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Fluency Assessment Procedure

1. The fluency assessments are taken from the Phonics Bookshelf books from the Houghton Mifflin reading series. The assessments are used after the high frequency words and skills are taught, but before the students have seen the book.
2. The Phonics Bookshelf books are retyped on a single page. The line by line cumulative word totals are added.
3. The student reads off of one copy while the teacher marks on another copy.
4. The following directions are given to the student:

“When I say “Start”, begin reading at the top of this page. If you stop on a word too long, I will give it to you. If you come to a word that you cannot read, just say “Pass” and go on to the next word. Read at a comfortable rate. Do not try to read too fast. At the end of one minute I will say “Stop”. Do you understand?
5. Errors are circled as the student reads.

The total words read are calculated and the errors subtracted out to determine Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM). The accuracy of the reading is found by dividing the WCPM by the total number of words read.



Reading Log

Name _____

Book Title	Aloud	Aloud	Aloud	I.R.	Rating
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					

I.R.: Independent Reading

Aloud: Read to someone else



Reading Log

Name _____

Book Title	Aloud	I.R.	I.R.	I.R.	Rating
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					

I.R.: Independent Reading
 Aloud: Read to someone else

DOES THE ADDITION OF A REPEATED READING COMPONENT TO AN
EXISTING READING CURRICULUM IMPROVE STUDENT FLUENCY?

by

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B.S. Winona State University, 1980

A capstone submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Winona State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Science

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This capstone entitled:
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Curriculum Improve Student Reading?
written by Sheryl A. Pischke
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Outside Consultant

Date _____

The final copy of the capstone has been examined by the signatories, and we find that
both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in
the above mentioned discipline.

I dedicate this capstone to my husband, Don
and my children, Ben, Jay and Katie.

Without their patience and support, I would never have been able to
earn my Masters.

Thanks for sacrificing two years for me.

Pischke, Sheryl Ann (M.S., Education)

Does the Addition of a Repeated Reading Component to an Existing Reading Curriculum Improve Student Reading?

Capstone directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman

Abstract

Students in the Title 1 program were stuck in the decoding stage of reading and were unable to read fluently. A repeated reading instructional component was added to the existing reading program to address this problem. The students in first and second grade read a passage for three days. After this repeated practice, each student completed a timed running record. The students graphed their results, which helped them visualize their progress. Third and fourth grade students took a timed running record of each passage twice. The students had not seen the passage before taking the first timed running record. The students then read the passage for a week and did another timed running record on the same passage. Once again, the students graphed the results.

Data was collected at the beginning of the year using the Early Star Reading Test for first grade and the Star Reading Test for the second through fourth graders. Data was collected again in January and in June using the same tests. The students completed a timed running record in January at the beginning of the study and in June at the end of the study. These passages were at the appropriate grade level for each group of students.

Results indicated that students gained in fluency by being able to read more words per minute than at the beginning of the study, according to the timed running records. The data from the Star and Early Star testing showed greater growth for the students the first semester than the second semester when the study was being conducted. Even though the addition of a repeated reading component to the current reading program did not show the desired results, some of the students did show remarkable gains in their reading scores. A

repeated reading component will be added to the Title 1 program as a permanent part of the reading curriculum.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1	1
Introduction.....	1
<i>Need for the Study</i>	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	2
<i>Purpose of the Study</i>	2
<i>Statement of the Hypotheses</i>	3
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	3
<i>Limitations and Delimitations of the Study</i>	4
CHAPTER II.....	6
Literature Review.....	6
<i>Introduction</i>	6
<i>Phonemic Awareness</i>	6
<i>Phonics</i>	6
<i>Vocabulary</i>	7
<i>Comprehension</i>	9
<i>Automaticity</i>	11
<i>Fluency</i>	12
<i>Teaching Fluency</i>	13
<i>Independent Silent Reading</i>	14
<i>Guided Fluency Instruction</i>	15
Chapter III.....	18
Methods and Procedures	18
<i>Over View</i>	18
<i>Design</i>	19
<i>Selection of Students</i>	19
<i>Validity of Measures</i>	20
<i>Reliability Measures</i>	20
<i>Conclusion</i>	20
Chapter IV.....	22
Results and Discussion	22
<i>Introduction</i>	22
<i>Procedure</i>	22
<i>Variables</i>	23
<i>Hypothesis Testing</i>	24
Chapter V	26
Summary and Conclusion.....	26
<i>Introduction</i>	26
<i>Summary of Results</i>	26
<i>Conclusions</i>	34
<i>Recommendations</i>	35
References.....	36
Appendix A.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix B	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix C	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix D.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Need for the Study

Students in the Title 1 program participate with their classmates during reading instruction in the classroom. The classroom teachers use the McGraw-Hill reading basal series. The Title 1 students have an additional 25 minutes of reading instruction in the Title 1 room. The first and second graders work with the Early Success reading program in the Title 1 program, while the third and fourth graders work with the Soar to Success reading program. The Early Success program focuses on phonics skills to help students learn to decode words.

The Early Success program has a component where students use letter tiles to make words. This gives students the opportunity to play with sounds within words and to come to a better understanding of how letters combine to form sounds and words. At the end of each making words activity, the students are to find the mystery word, which is made up of all the letters used during the activity. The students especially enjoy finding this mystery word.

The second component of the Early Success program is sound box. In this activity, the students are to break a word into its individual sounds as they write the word. This activity not only helps students to start to connect letters to the sounds they make, but it also helps give the students practice in spelling. Early Success starts to introduce comprehension skills to the students with some guided comprehension activities.

Soar to Success, which starts in third grade, focuses on comprehension. Soar to Success is based on four comprehension components: making predictions, giving

summaries, asking questions and clarifying. Students also continue to work on decoding, especially of multisyllabic words. It is assumed that most students can decode words by the time they have reached this level in their reading.

Despite the additional reading instruction, many of the Title 1 students continued to have difficulty with fluency. Many of the students spent so much effort on decoding words that they failed to comprehend what they had read.

Statement of the Problem

Students in the Title 1 program were focusing on decoding words when reading, which caused reading fluency difficulties. Oral reading was often choppy with little expression and often no comprehension. After reviewing research for solutions to this problem, a study was set up involving repeated readings to increase student fluency, which should also improve comprehension (Kuhn, 2003, p. 210-225).

Purpose of the Study

This study was set up to help the Title 1 students increase their fluency. According to the latest research, using repeated oral reading in the classroom helps students gain fluency (Rasinski, 2003). Included in these methods are several varieties of choral reading, neurological impress reading, recorded reading, echo reading, along with a variety of performance reading methods such as reader's theater, radio reading and book talks. After exploring several methods of oral reading, it was decided to attempt the method known as repeated reading. The repeated reading method was chosen for two reasons. First, "repeated oral reading substantially improves word recognition, speed, and accuracy as well as fluency"

(Armbruster et al, 2001). The second reason to choose the repeated reading method involved the time restraints concerning the Title 1 program. Each group of students was seen for twenty-five minutes each day. This meant that the method used to work on fluency had to fit into a twenty-five minute period.

Statement of the Hypotheses

The Addition of a Repeated Reading Component to an Existing Reading Curriculum Does Improve Student Reading.

Definition of Terms

Fluency in this paper is defined as the ability to read text with speed and accuracy. Fluent readers decode words automatically. They are able to group words automatically for meaning. When reading aloud, fluent readers sound like they are speaking with expression (Armbruster et al, 2001).

Repeated reading is a term used to indicate that a student practices reading a selected passage until the student can read the passage accurately and with expression. Often practicing the selection repeatedly helps to promote an increase in reading rate (Samuels, 2003, p. 166-183).

Average in this paper stands for the mean score.

Running records are a method of recording what students say and do while reading a passage.

They {running records} can judge what the reader already knows, what the reader attended to, and what the reader overlooked. They can assess how well each reader is pulling together what he/she already knows about letters, sounds and words in order to get to the messages. This kind of information allows teachers to prompt, support and challenge individual learners. The records allow teachers to describe how children are working on a text (Clay, 2000, p. 4).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Control Variable.

The process of determining the subjects for this study was limited to those students currently in the Title 1 program. This group encompasses students who are struggling with reading based on test scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Minnesota Comprehensive Test.

This study was conducted throughout the school year. The students were tested during the first semester of the school year to establish baselines. These same students participated in the repeated reading activities during the second semester and tested again to determine if there was any growth while participating in the study.

Independent Variables.

Attendance was a limiting factor in this study. Several students who started the study moved during the year. Other students moved in or joined the Title 1 program during the year, but even though they participated in the repeated reading activities with the other students, they could not be included in the study because they had not participated in some of the preliminary data collection activities.

Poor attendance may have negatively affected the results of a small minority of the subjects. The students in this study were required to practice their repeated reading selections daily. They were tested on their reading selections weekly. If a student missed several days of school during this period, the practice time was affected which could affect the results when the student was tested.

Most of the students were enthusiastic participants in this study. They helped with the charting of the results from the running records. The students were eager to look at their graphs to see how they had done. Unfortunately, several students had difficulty with this study. These students would mouth the words while everyone choral read the reading selection. It was obvious they were not following along with their eyes and reading the words. Short talks were given about how everyone needs to practice when they are learning a new skill. Examples of several activities in which practice is necessary before mastering a skill were given including football, swimming, playing a musical instrument and reading. These pep talks seemed to work for a short time and then the behavior would resume.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

According to the National Reading Panel (2000), the three main components needed to become a reader are-alphabetics, fluency, and comprehension. Alphabetics consists of two strands that have a direct impact on learning to read-phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. The comprehension component also consists of two strands-vocabulary instruction and text comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness instruction requires teaching children to identify and manipulate phonemes in spoken syllables and words (National Reading Panel, 2000). Phonemic awareness training improves students' reading and spelling performances (Armbruster et al, 2001). After reviewing over fifty-two studies related to phonemic awareness, the National Reading Panel (2000) found phonemic awareness training improved student comprehension because students developed the ability to read words rapidly and accurately and thus had more time to attend to understanding what they were reading. This improvement continued long after the training ended.

Phonics

The second strand associated with alphabetics is phonics instruction, according to the National Reading Panel (2000). Our English language is made up of

an alphabet or system of letters. This code involves a correspondence between the letters and sounds represented by the letters. Decoding, then, is figuring out how to pronounce the printed word based on this letter-sound correspondence (Armbruster et al, 2001). Phonics instruction involves teaching students reading and spelling by helping them acquire the symbol-sound relationships. In other words, phonics instruction is teaching students the sound made by a written symbol or symbols (Rasinski & Padak, 2001). The National Reading Panel (2000) found that a systematic phonics instruction was effective for all students. The research also found the systematic phonics method produced significant gains for those children in kindergarten through sixth grade who were having difficulty with reading. One systematic phonics instruction program starts by teaching the students beginning consonant sounds. According to this system, beginning consonant sounds are consistent in the sounds they represent. After learning the beginning consonant sounds, the students are taught the most common rimes (Rasinski & Padak, 2001). Edward Fry (1998) identified 38 rimes that can be used to make over 654 one-syllable words. These same rimes can help a student decode thousands of multisyllabic words.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary building is another component of a good reading program. Studies have indicated that students who have a larger vocabulary comprehend text more easily (National Reading Panel, 2000). “There is increasing evidence that lack

of vocabulary is a key component underlying school failure for disadvantaged students” (Graves, 2003, p. 145).

Children learn vocabulary either directly or indirectly. Indirect learning of vocabulary would include hearing people talk, being read to, and reading on their own. Being taught new words would be direct learning (Armbruster et al, 2001).

Teachers can help encourage students to develop “word-consciousness” (Graves, 2003, p. 140-165). Students should be encouraged to understand why certain words are used in writing, have an interest in understanding and using new words and have an interest in learning about new words (Graves, 2003, p. 140-165). Teaching students ways to learn how to figure out new words on their own will also help students gain a larger vocabulary. Students should be taught how to use a dictionary, use word clues in text to determine meaning, use suffixes, prefixes and root words to determine meaning (Armbruster et al, 2001). Students should also be encouraged to read a wide variety of texts. The more they read the more vocabulary they learn (Graves, 2003, p. 140-165).

When actively teaching new vocabulary words, the students should be given the definition of the word. They should then have activities to work with the new word and opportunities to discuss the new word (Graves, 2003, p. 140-165). Vocabulary instruction before reading a text increases comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). Vocabulary words to be taught should be words found in the text. The meaning of the vocabulary words should be taught before reading the text. Activities should be completed that will help students with comprehension of the

word meaning. The students should be exposed to the new words repeatedly (Armbruster et al, 2001).

The following are examples of activities that could be used to help students learn new vocabulary words. First, “Word-of-the Day” (Graves, 2003, p. 140-165), in this activity either the teacher or the students choose a word for the class to study. This gives students a chance to see the wide variety of words available. The word of the day is posted on the wall along with its meaning. The students are encouraged to try to use the word sometime within the day (Graves, 2003, p. 140-165). Another activity is a word scaffold. In this activity, the new word is place within a word web. The students then determine what the word looks like, feels like, tastes like, smells like and feels like (Graves, 2003, p. 140-165). Another activity for new vocabulary words is to brainstorm words that relate to or are similar to the new word (Graves, 2003, p. 140-165).

Comprehension

Gathering meaning from a text comes from a process where the reader takes the information from the text and combines this information with their personal knowledge and experience (National Reading Panel, 2000). “Research over 30 years has shown that instruction in comprehension can help students understand what they read, remember what they read, and communicate with others about what they read” (Armbruster et al, 2001).

Teaching comprehension should begin as soon as students start to read (Armbruster et al, 2001). Comprehension strategies should be taught first by teacher

modeling for the students. The students gradually take a more independent role as they learn the strategies (National Reading Panel, 2000). The teacher and the student should work together on the strategy after modeling. Then students should practice the strategy on their own with some teacher guidance. Finally, the students should complete the strategy on their own (Duke, 2003, p. 205-242).

The six best strategies for teaching comprehension are monitoring comprehension, using graphic organizers, answering questions about the text, asking questions, understanding story structure or plot and summarizing (Armbruster et al, 2001).

One method to monitor comprehension is called “think aloud”. Think aloud not only increases comprehension when students use this method but also when teachers think aloud while reading to the students (Duke, 2003, p. 205-242). Students trained to think aloud may have better comprehension because they take time to stop and monitor their comprehension. If need be, they can go back and reread the text for comprehension (Duke, 2003, p. 205-242).

Graphic organizers help students to visualize the text. Examples of graphic organizers are story maps, flow charts, webs, time lines, and semantic maps (Duke, 2003, p. 205-242).

Having students answer questions after reading a selection is a strategy that has been in use for many years (Duke, 2003, p. 205-242). Research now indicates that students also comprehend better when they ask the questions about the text (Duke, 2003, p. 205-242).

The use of story maps to identify the setting, events, problems, and goals of a story helps students understand the story structure (Armbruster et al, 2001). “Students who can recognize story structure have greater appreciation, understanding, and memory for stories” (Armbruster et al, 2001).

Summarization is the ability to read a selection, decide what is important and what is not. Students should then take that information and state the main ideas and important details in their own words (Duke, 2003, p. 205-242).

Another strategy that has been found to improve comprehension is predicting, or taking a guess. The students read the title of the selection and study any pictures on the cover of the book. They may also look at the first couple of pages of the text. Then the students make a prediction about what they think the story will be about. As they read the selection, the students determine how accurate their prediction was (Duke, 2003, p. 205-242). Not only is the predicting important but studies suggested that comparing the prediction to the text and to prior knowledge increases comprehension (Duke, 2003, p. 205-242).

Using any one of these strategies when teaching will help students improve their comprehension. However, “evidence suggests that teaching a combination of reading comprehension techniques is the most effective” (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Automaticity

Beginning readers must focus all of their attention on decoding the words being read. They read slowly and spend so much time decoding that comprehension

suffers (Blevins, 2001). The first time a new word is encountered, the reader will try to decode the word letter by letter. Every time the reader encounters this word, the time involved in decoding the word will decrease as the reader becomes more familiar with the word. The reader will move from letter by letter decoding, to chunks and finally to automatic processing of the word (Blevins, 2001). Beginning readers use most of their attention on decoding words, which leaves little mental energy for comprehension. As decoding becomes more automatic, attention can be devoted to understanding the meaning of the text (Rasinski, 2003).

Fluent readers read words automatically. They can recognize words with no decoding needed. Since decoding has become automatic, very little energy is needed for the actual word reading. This means the student has more energy available for comprehension (Rasinski, 2003). A few students tend to become stuck in the decoding process when reading. These students have a difficult time remembering what has been read and thus will be unable to relate this information to their own background knowledge. These students have difficulty comprehending what has been read (National Reading Panel, 2000). Decoding skills can become automatic with practice. In most cases, improvement in decoding leads to gains in comprehension. When the decoding skills improve, the student can focus on comprehension. Comprehension, however, never becomes automatic (Rasinski, 2003).

Fluency

Fluency is the second component of a good reading program according to the National Reading Panel (2000). Both teachers and researchers agree that fluency is an

important goal for students. Unfortunately, most reading basals or reading instruction materials do not give teachers much information on how to help students achieve fluency (Rasinski, 2003). Fluency was often neglected because it was assumed that students developed good fluency from good decoding skills (Reading Links, 2002). Research indicates a high correlation between fluency and scores on comprehension (Reading Links, 2002). Not only do students need to practice to increase fluency, (National Reading Panel, 2000) students must also read a wide variety of texts to become fluent (Kuhn, 2003, p. 210-225). Hundreds of studies conclude, the best readers read more than poor readers do. This would suggest that the more students read, the more their fluency, comprehension and vocabulary grows. No reliable studies have been done that have proven this, however. It could just be that good readers choose to read more than poor readers do (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Children who can read fluently can read words automatically, group words quickly to gain meaning, and read aloud effortlessly and with expression (Reading Links, 2002). Fluency should sound like talking with appropriate phrasing, rapid use of punctuation and placing emphasis or pauses so the text makes sense (Reading Links, 2002).

Teaching Fluency

There are two main methods typically used to teach fluency. The first is guided repeated oral reading which includes explicit guidance and feedback from the teacher. The second is independent silent reading at home or at school. There is minimal guidance or feedback involved in independent silent reading (National

Reading Panel, 2000). The National Reading Panel (2000) found sixteen studies on fluency reading that met their research criteria. The findings indicated that repeated oral reading methods with guidance from teachers, parents or peers improved word recognition, fluency and comprehension for students in all grade levels in both regular and special education classes. Both good and poor readers showed improvement. Guided repeated oral reading is better than silent reading for improving word recognition, accuracy, fluency and comprehension. Guided repeated oral reading helps good readers through fourth grade and poor readers into high school (Reading Links, 2002). Not only did repeated readings improve performance on the passage being read, but it has also been found to improve performance on other passages not read before (Rasinski & Padak, 2001).

Independent Silent Reading

Independent silent reading includes such strategies as SSR (sustained silent reading), DEAR (drop everything and read), and Accelerated Reader (Reading Links, 2002). According to the National Reading Panel (2000) there are not enough good quality studies available to determine if independent silent reading increases the development of fluency, vocabulary development and/or reading comprehension. The data does suggest that independent silent reading is not effective when it is the only reading instruction used to develop fluency, especially for beginning readers who are still at the decoding stage of reading (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Guided Fluency Instruction

Fluency instruction should include ongoing assessment and modeling with explicit instruction. The goals should include automaticity and comprehension. Teachers must use a variety of teaching and learning strategies that let students know fluent reading is not just fast reading. Active participation from all students must be required. Teachers need to supply reading texts or passages that are at each student's instructional level and interest level. Teachers need to provide many opportunities for repeated reading and increase the students' time on task (Reading Links, 2002).

Since repeated reading of a passage is one of the best ways to improve fluency, teachers need to provide opportunities for students to want to reread a passage. Students will reread text when they are going to perform the text in front of an audience. They will also reread text when they are charting reading progress (Rasinski & Padak, 2001). There are many guided repeated reading teaching techniques. The following is a review of some of the most common.

Repeated Reading.

In repeated reading, the student reads a text to the teacher. As the student reads, the teacher keeps a running record. The student's progress is charted. The student practices the text several times and then rereads the text to the teacher while the teacher does another running record. The student's progress is charted again (Reading Links, 2002).

Neurological Impress Method.

With the Neurological Impress Method (NIM), the teacher and the student read the text orally in unison. The student should sit next to the teacher so that the teacher can read into the student's ear. The teacher models fluent, expressive reading while the student follows along the best he/she can. The teacher should move a finger along the print as they read (Reading Links, 2002).

Echo Reading.

During echo reading, the teacher reads one sentence of text correctly. The student then repeats the text as modeled. This continues until the student can read more than one sentence at a time with accuracy (Reading Links, 2002).

Radio Reading.

In radio reading, the reader and the teacher have scripts. The other students are listeners and have no scripts. The students rehearse until they are ready to perform. This allows the student to paraphrase without embarrassment, as the listeners cannot follow along. This helps take some of the stress out of the reading and puts the emphases on the meaning (Reading Links, 2002).

Readers' Theater.

In readers' theater, the students select the text and assign parts. They practice the reading, getting help with unknown words, phrasing or expression as needed.

When the students feel they are ready, they put on their performance for an audience (class, parents, etc.) (Reading Links, 2002).

Screen Readings.

Screen readings of captioned programs involve reading the closed captions of a television program. The teacher would pick a program that is related to literature or a content area the students are studying. Students would review vocabulary as needed. The teacher would plan related activities for after the performance. This is especially effective for English Language Learners as they can view the program several times. The students can create books or material related to the program. The students should also read related texts (Reading Links, 2002).

Building Reading Rate.

Building reading rate is similar to repeated readings. This is especially effective for students who can read accurately but without fluency. Start with a passage that the student can read with 90% accuracy. Establish a base rate on a one-minute reading. Set a target of 20% - 40% above the base rate. Graph the target and have the student reread the passage until he/she meets the target. Increase the target another 20% - 40% and continue on a similar passage. Once the target is met, increase the difficulty of the target (Reading Links, 2002).

Chapter III

Methods and Procedures

Over View

The students involved in the study receive a whole-language based reading program with some phonics instruction in their mainstream classrooms. The students also receive instruction in a reading program in the Title 1 program, which covers phonics, decoding, and comprehension. According to the National Institute for Literacy, the components of a good reading program include instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (Armbruster et al, 2001). The regular reading program covers all of these components except fluency. The supplementary reading program the students receive in the Title 1 program does not have a fluency component either. Research indicates that those students who are not fluent focus their attention on decoding words and have little attention left over for comprehension (Armbruster et al, 2001). Research has also found good readers spend a great deal more time reading than do poor readers (Armbruster et al, 2001). Two methods for improving fluency recommended by research are teacher modeling of fluent reading, and providing guidance while a student repeatedly reads passages at an instructional reading level (Armbruster et al, 2001).

Design

The students worked with a reading passage at their instructional reading level. Several different methods of repeated reading were used to keep the students interested in the project. These methods included, listening to the teacher read the passage while the students followed along silently, choral reading, paired reading and silent reading. After practicing the selection three or more times, each student tested on the passage. Testing involved the students reading the passage to the teacher while the teacher followed along on a second copy of the passage and marked any errors the students made. The teacher timed the students for one minute and placed a mark at the last word read during the period. The words per minute were calculated by counting how many words were read within the minute and subtracting any missed words. The students then graphed this number. The students would move on to another reading passage with a similar instructional level and repeat the process.

Selection of Students

The subjects for this study were all of the current Title 1 students receiving services for reading in first through fourth grade. The students in the study qualify for the Title 1 program, which means they have scored significantly below average on either the Iowa Basics Skills Test or the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment. The Title 1 Kindergarten students were not included in this study because students need to have the basic skills in decoding and need to know basic sight words before fluency instruction can begin. The study was limited to first through fourth graders.

Validity of Measures

Testing students at the beginning of the year using either the STAR reading test or the Early Literacy Test determined their reading level. At the end of the first semester, students completed the testing again. Comparing the test scores from these two assessments will determine how much growth has occurred on each student's reading level. The students will work on the fluency-reading program for the second semester and will test at the end of the year with the STAR reading test or the Early Literacy Test. These scores will be compared with the scores from the first half of the year's test results to determine if the fluency-reading program was successful in increasing student fluency.

Reliability Measures

Each student will complete a running record passage at grade level before the fluency instruction begins to give an indication of reading fluency before instruction begins. Students will read a passage at the end of the instructional period to determine progress made by each student. These passages will also be scored according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress's Oral Reading Fluency Scale. (Kuhn, 2003, p. 210-225)

Conclusion

This study was designed to determine if the addition of a repeated reading component to an existing reading program would increase fluency. This study will be conducted in the Title 1 Program using the current first through fourth grade Title 1

students. The students will be asked to test on a reading passage that is at their instructional reading level. They will then practice this passage several times. The students will test on the passage a second time. Results from both reading tests will be graphed so students can see their results.

Whatever the results of the study, the tester feels that fluency is an important component of a good reading program. Since there is no fluency component in our current reading program, the repeated reading procedures started for this study will be incorporated into the normal teaching routine for the Title 1 students.

Chapter IV

Results and Discussion

Introduction

Due to a lack of fluency instruction in the regular reading class and the difficulty some of the Title 1 students exhibit moving from decoding words to reading fluently, a study was set up to see if adding a repeated reading component to the current reading instruction would increase fluency.

Procedure

The first and second grade students read a story for three days. They would usually read the story in a modified round robin style where each child would read a page and then the students would choral read the same pages together. Then the following two students would read the next pages, and everyone would choral read these pages. This method would continue until the students finished the story. On the third day, the students choral read the story and then each student completed a running record of the first one hundred words of the story. Each student read for a minute. Errors were marked on a copy of the passage as the student read. Each student's words per minute were calculated, along with a percentage of words correct. The teacher and students then graphed the results. Graphing helped the students keep track of their progress from week to week.

The third and fourth grade students followed a slightly different procedure. They tested on the story passage the first time without having seen the story. The students read for a minute and any errors were marked. After figuring out the words per minute and the accuracy, the students and teacher graphed the results. Then the students practiced the passage for a week. Techniques to practice the story passages included choral reading, buddy reading and silent reading. The students tested on the passage a second time while being timed and errors were recorded. The results were graphed.

Variables

One variable that affected the results negatively was the pre- and post-testing passage used to determine the beginning and ending fluency rates of each student. Two different reading selections were used, one for the pretest and one for the post-testing. After completing the testing, the examiner noted that the same reading passage should have been used for both tests. Even though both reading selections were supposed to be at grade level, the post-test passage for first grade was noted to be more difficult than the pre-test which skewed the results of the study.

Another variable that may have affected the results of the study was student attitude. It was felt that some of the students did not put as much effort into the end of the study testing as they had into the winter or fall testing. The students might have been tired of all the testing done throughout the year. In addition, some of the students seemed to be anxious for summer vacation to start and were not functioning in a school mode anymore.

Due to the number of groups in the Title 1 program, an assistant worked with some of the groups. The assistant helped with the repeated reading practices and testing. She was not always as diligent as the tester on timing the students, especially the younger groups and so some of the students did not get as much practice as some of the other students.

. The final variable, which may have affected the study, was the Masters program that the tester was involved in during the year. Many new teaching methods and ideas were tried throughout the school year, because of new knowledge gained through the Masters classes. It is difficult to determine if some of the teaching methods tried throughout the year skewed the study results.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis for the study was that repeated reading would increase fluency. The students completed a timed running record before the actual study began. The results of this test were recorded. Then the students worked on their repeated reading passages. At the end of the semester, the students completed another timed running record. Comparing the first running record results to the second running record results showed how much if any improvements the students had made.

Testing of the students took place in the fall, winter and spring using the STAR and Early Star reading test. This test gives a scaled score along with a reading grade equivalent and NCE score for each student. The difference between the gains from fall to winter, and winter to spring was calculated. The study occurred the second half of the year, so comparing the gains from the first half of the year to the

second half of the year when the study took place would indicate if the students gained in their reading level from the repeated readings exercises.

Chapter V
Summary and Conclusion
Introduction

In this study, the students were given the Star Reading test in the fall, winter, and spring to determine their reading levels. No interventions were used in the first semester of the year. At the beginning of the second semester, the students completed a minute reading test, which determined a fluency base line for each student. Students started working on the repeated reading intervention after the baselines were determined. The students practiced a reading passage daily for one week. At the end of the week, the students tested on the passage and graphed the results. This process continued throughout the second semester. At the end of the semester, the students completed another minute test. The results from this test were compared to the results from the base line test given in January. The Star test scores from the fall, winter, and spring were also calculated to compare the results.

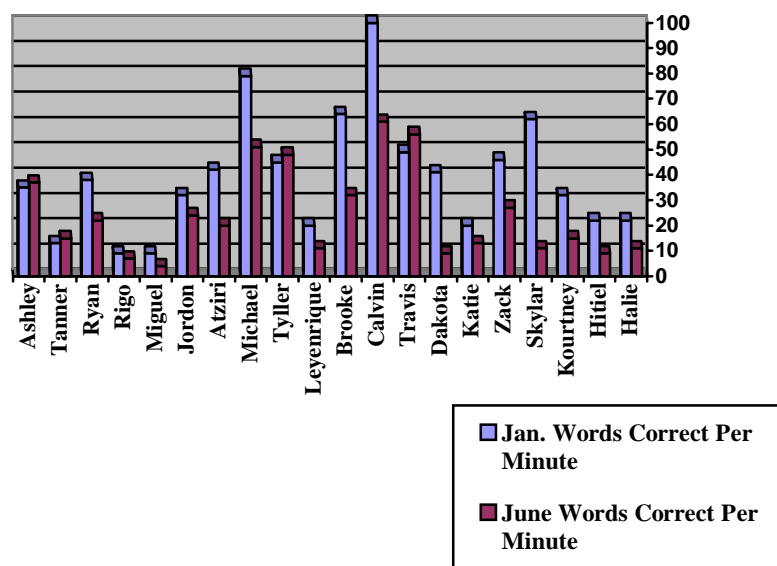
Summary of Results

First grade.

The results from the first grade minute tests showed a loss of twelve words per minute when comparing the winter running record testing to the spring running record testing (See appendix A). Out of the twenty-first

grade students who participated in the study, four showed growth when comparing the January minute testing to the June minute testing. When doing the testing, reading passages were chosen at a first grade level. After having the students read both reading passages, the tester felt the June reading passage was more difficult than the January passage. If this study were conducted again, the tester would use the same reading passage to test at the beginning and end of the study because it is felt the results would be more reliable. (See chart below for results.)

First Grade Minute Tests Results

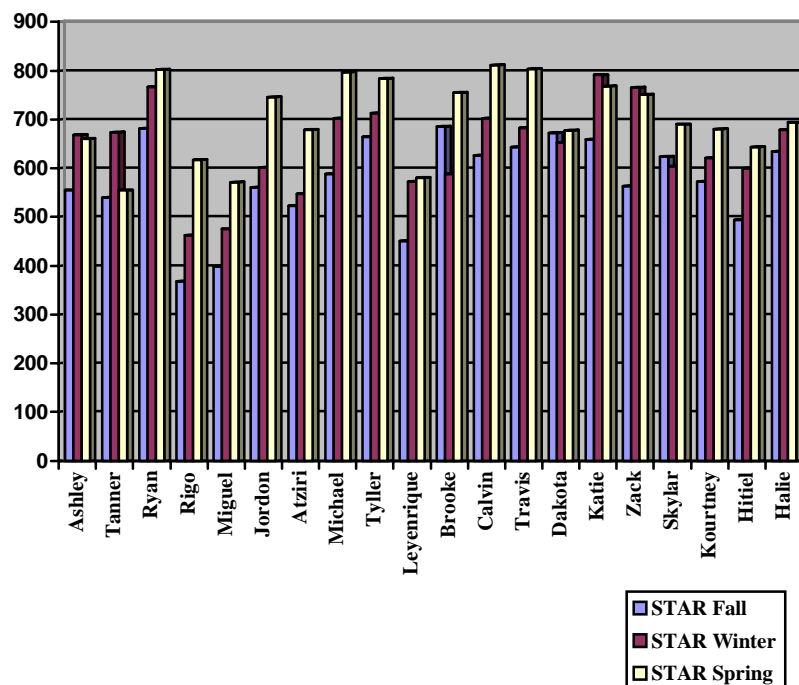


The scaled scores from the Early Star Reading Test were compared next. The difference between the fall scaled score and the winter scaled score was determined (See Appendix A). These differences were averaged for a score of sixty-five. Then the difference between the winter and spring

scaled scores was computed. The differences were again averaged for a score of fifty-seven. Overall, the students showed more gains in the first semester (65) than the second semester (57) when the repeated reading study was completed. It is important to note that all of the students showed gains in reading from the fall to the spring.

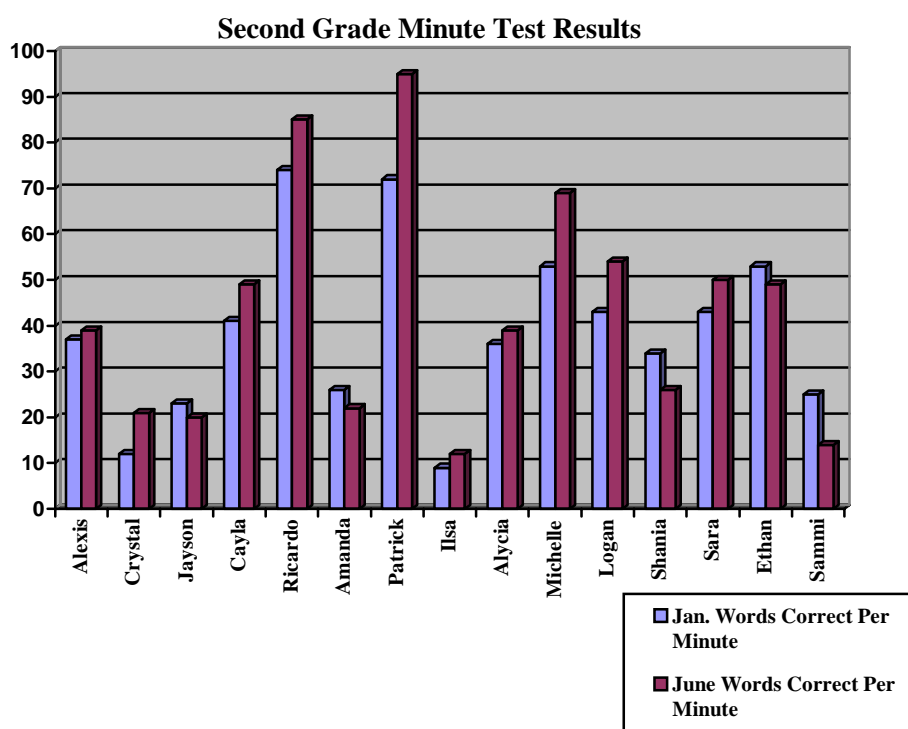
Even though the overall scores show more gains in the first semester there were sixteen of the twenty students who showed gains from the winter to the spring testing. Of those students, twelve of the twenty students had higher gains in the second semester than the first semester. (See chart below for results.)

First Grade STAR Test Results



Second grade.

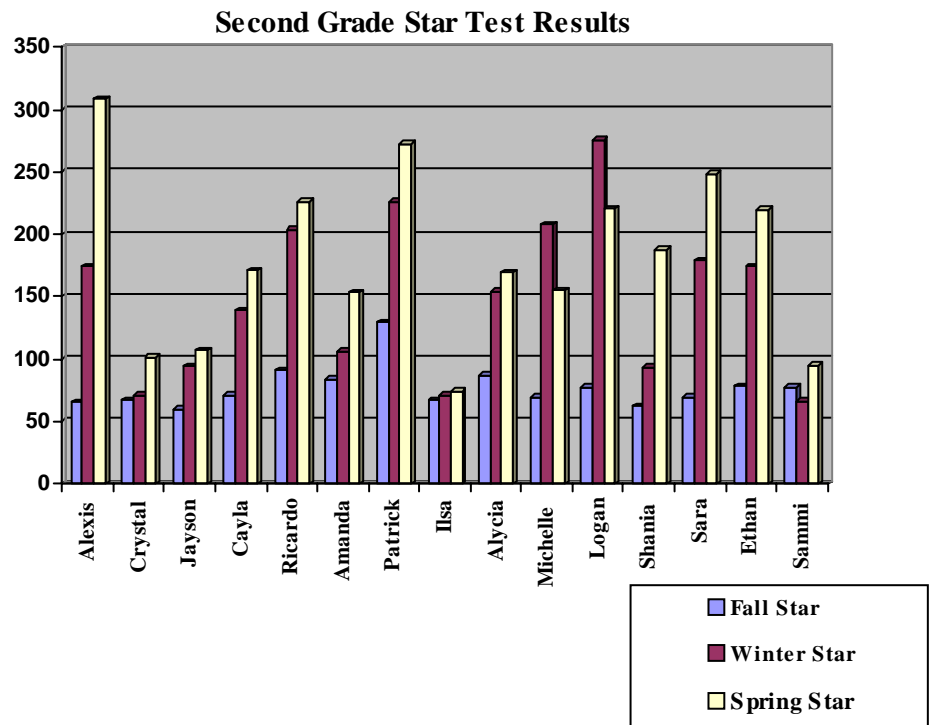
The results from the second grade minute tests showed a gain of four words per minute when comparing the winter testing to the spring testing (See Appendix B). Out of the fifteen-second grade students who participated in the study, ten showed growth when comparing the January minute testing to the June minute testing. (See chart below for results.)



The scaled scores from the Star Reading Test were compared next (See Appendix B). The difference between the fall scaled scores and the winter scaled scores was determined. These differences were averaged for a score of sixty-seven. Then the difference between the winter and spring scaled scores was computed. The differences were again averaged for a score of thirty. Overall, the students showed more gains in the first semester

(67) than the second semester (30) when the repeated reading study was completed. It is important to note that all of the students showed gains in reading from the fall to the spring.

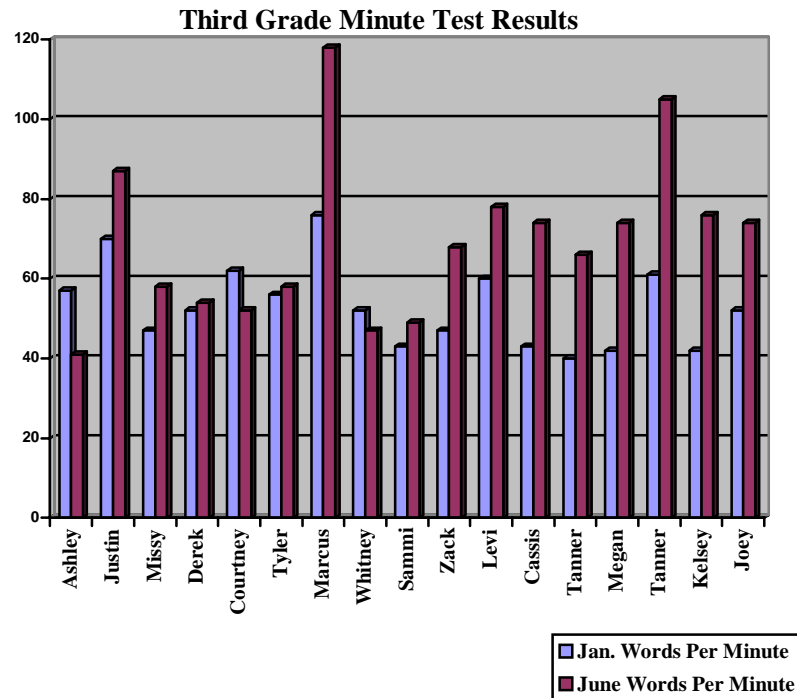
Even though the overall scores showed more gains in the first semester there were thirteen of the fifteen students who showed gains from the winter to the spring testing. Of those students, six of the fifteen students had higher gains in the second semester than the first semester. (See chart below for results.)



Third grade.

The results from the third grade minute tests showed a gain of fifteen words per minute when comparing the winter testing and the spring testing (See Appendix C). Out of the seventeen third grade students who

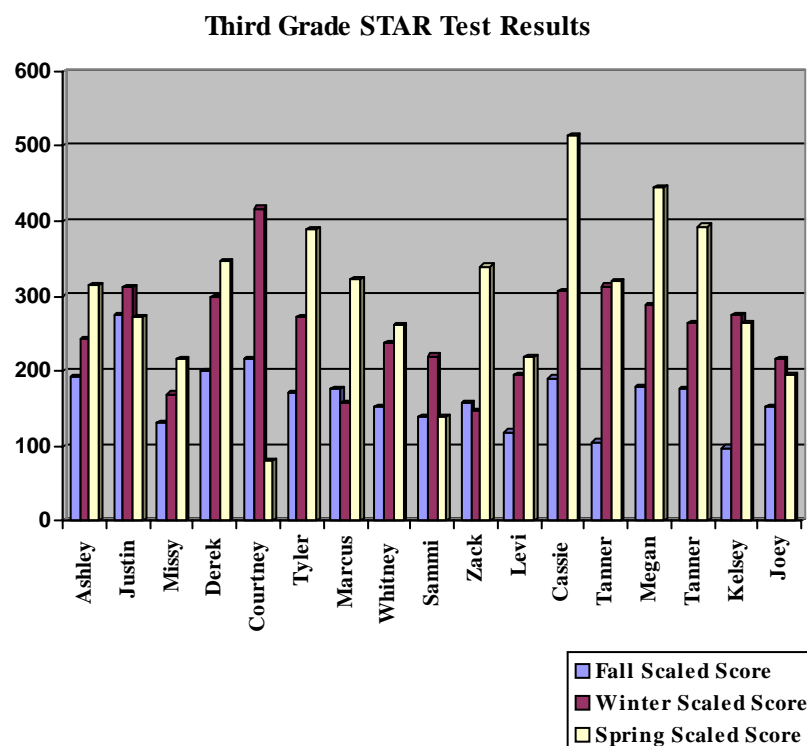
participated in the study, fourteen showed growth when comparing the January minute testing to the June minute testing. (See chart below for results.)



The scaled scores from the Star Reading Test were compared next (See Appendix C). The difference between the fall scaled scores and the winter scaled scores was determined. These differences were averaged for a score of eighty-three. Then the difference between the winter and spring scaled scores was computed. The differences were again averaged for a score of thirty-nine. Overall, the students showed more gains in the first semester (83) than the second semester (39) when the repeated reading study was completed. Two of the third grade students did not show growth according to the Star reading tests. One of the two students has some significant health concerns, which may have affected the testing results.

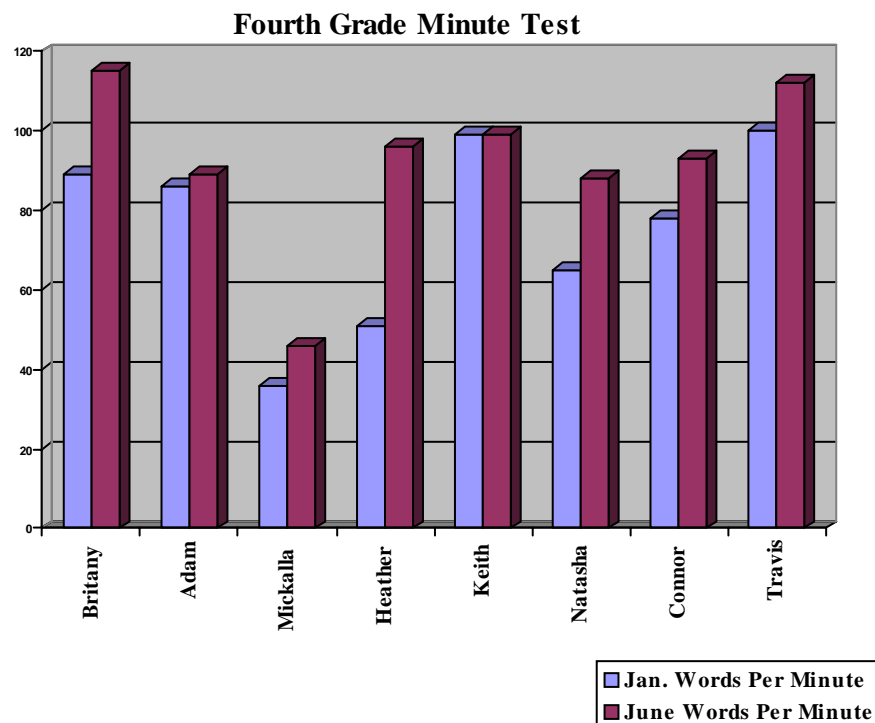
Even though the overall scores show more gains in the first semester there were twelve of the seventeen students who showed gains from the winter to the spring testing. Of those students, eight of the seventeen students had higher gains in the second semester than the first semester.

(See chart below for results.)



Fourth grade.

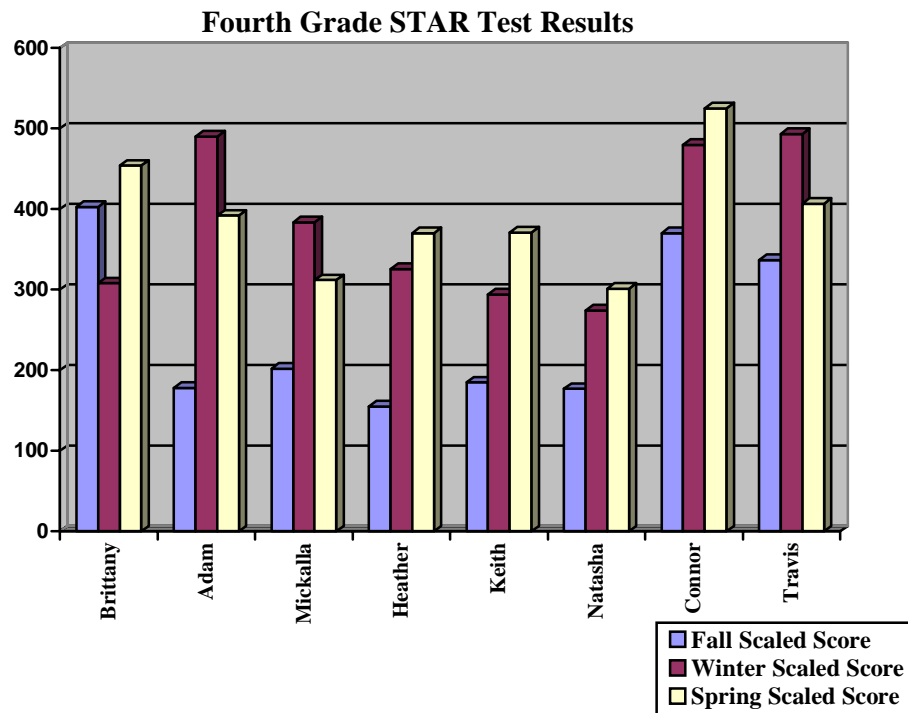
The results from the fourth grade minute tests showed a gain of fifteen words per minute when comparing the winter testing and the spring testing (See Appendix D). Out of the eight-fourth grade students who participated in the study, seven showed growth when comparing the January minute testing to the June minute testing. (See chart below for results.)



The scaled scores from the Star Reading Test were compared next. The difference between the fall scaled scores and the winter scaled scores was determined (See Appendix D). These differences were averaged for a score of one hundred sixteen. Then the difference between the winter and spring scaled scores was computed. The differences were again averaged for a score of nine. Overall, the students showed more gains in the first semester (116) than the second semester (9) when the repeated reading study was being done. It is important to note that all of the students showed gains in reading from the fall to the spring.

Even though the overall scores show more gains in the first semester there were five of the eight students who showed gains from the winter to the spring testing. Of those students, one of the eight students had higher

gains in the second semester than the first semester. (See chart below for results.)



Conclusions

The average gain was six words per minute for the minute tests with the first grade results included. If the first grade results are not included in the mix, the average gain was eleven words per minute on the minute tests.

Even though the Star reading results indicated less growth for the period when the study was being conducted, when the results are broken down there were forty-six out of sixty students who showed gains from the winter to the spring testing. This means seventy-six percent of the students made gains in the testing semester. Of those students, twenty-seven out of the sixty students had higher gains in the second semester than the first

semester. This means forty-five percent of the students had greater gains during the time of the study than in the first semester before the study occurred.

Recommendations

The gain in reading fluency shown by the number of words read per minute at the end of the study has convinced the tester that repeated readings should be added to the reading curriculum of the Title 1 program. Even though the scores on the Star reading tests were not as high as hoped, forty-five percent of the students made gains during this study.

The excitement and enthusiasm that the students showed while working on the repeated readings and watching their graphs grow is an indication that repeated readings should be continued. Anything that gets these students excited about reading is worth continuing.

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DOES THE DIRECT VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION OF HIGH FREQUENCY
WORDS INCREASE STUDENTS' FLUENCY AND COMPREHENSION?

by

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A capstone submitted to the
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The Effects of Direct Instruction of High Frequency Vocabulary Words on Students' Fluency and Comprehension

Capstone directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman

Abstract

Much research has been carried out in the area of reading instruction. The latest research states that struggling readers benefit from direct, explicit instruction in comprehension strategies and in direct vocabulary study. This study examined the effects of direct vocabulary instruction of high frequency words on students' fluency and comprehension.

Two groups of ninth grade alternative students participated in the direct instruction of high frequency vocabulary words in which targeted vocabulary words were identified and studied. Both groups received direct instruction on root forms, affixes, and phonics/pronunciation of each targeted vocabulary word and were tested individually on their decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills before and after the direct instruction of high frequency vocabulary study was implemented. Students' pre assessment scores were then compared to their post assessment scores.

Both groups of students that participated in the direct instruction of high frequency vocabulary study demonstrated an overall increase in their fluency. In the comprehension comparison, students from both groups either demonstrated an increase in their comprehension or their scores remained unchanged (neither increased nor decreased).

Overall results from this research study imply that the direct instruction of high frequency vocabulary words does increase students' fluency and comprehension. This effective practice should be considered when implementing and evaluating various instructional strategies in the classroom for the struggling reader.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I:	INTRODUCTION.....	1
	Need for the Study.....	2
	Statement of the Problem.....	2
	Purpose of the Study.....	2
	Statement of Hypothesis.....	2
	Definition of Terms.....	3
	Variables.....	3
	Limitations and Delimitations of the Study.....	4
II:	REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	5
	Vocabulary and Comprehension.....	6
	Word Recognition.....	7
	Reading Fluency and Direct Instruction.....	7
III:	METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	9
	Overview.....	9
	Research Design.....	9
	Subjects.....	9
	Instruments.....	10
	Validity and Reliability Measures.....	10
	Procedures.....	11
	Conclusion.....	12

IV:	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	13
	Independent Variables.....	13
	Dependent Variables.....	13
	Control Variable.....	14
	Overall Findings.....	14
V:	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	16
	Summary.....	16
	Conclusions.....	16
	Recommendations.....	17
	REFERENCES.....	18
	APPENDIX	
	A: Word List A 3717.....	19
	B: Passage B 37171.....	20
	C: Passage C 3717.....	21
	D: Anecdotal Notes.....	22
	E: Word Diary Data Sheet.....	23
	F: Decoding Pre and Post Assessment – Group A & B.....	24
	G: Fluency Pre and Post Assessment – Group A & B.....	25
	H: Comprehension Pre and Post Assessment – Group A & B.....	26

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Bridge Program located at Golden Hill School is one of five alternative settings in the Rochester Public School's Area Learning Center. Bridge serves ninth grade students who are labeled at risk for a variety of reasons: failing grades, academically behind in school, high truancy rate, lack of organizational skills, chemical dependency issues, school anxiety, and other significant factors. Most students have also not passed one or both of the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests in math or reading. While in the program, students receive intense preparation for the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests and have the opportunity to earn up to six credits (seven credits if they complete the summer school session) while enrolled in the program.

Students are referred through an application process, which takes place with a middle school/high school counselor, a county social worker/probation/truancy officer, or through a parent requesting a placement for their child. Once a student is referred, the team meets with the student, parent, and sometimes other support agencies persons working with the student. Students accepted into the program must demonstrate a high level of commitment and abide by all rules and expectations in order to remain in this choice alternative setting.

Currently, there are thirty-seven students enrolled at Bridge. The cap for this specialized program is forty-five, but as of this year, the limit has not been met. The staff consists of three instructional staff, one paraprofessional, along with ongoing support from the school social worker and special education instructor from the ALC.

Need for the Study

Many students enrolled at Bridge are classified as struggling readers. They have difficulty decoding words, have a limited sight word vocabulary, have little or no comprehension in what they read, and they usually stop reading at the first sign of difficulty. Due to their lack of reading skills, students eventually become disengaged in the reading process. Therefore, students sometimes find it easier to act out or to make other excuses, than to set themselves up for failure by challenging themselves to become better readers.

Statement of the Problem

One of the many goals at Bridge is to instill in students the importance of lifelong learning. However, in order to be a lifelong learner and to survive in the real world, students must become effective readers. After researching best practices in reading instruction and consulting with various reading experts, the direct instruction of high frequency vocabulary words study was implemented to determine if students' reading fluency and comprehension would increase.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether or not the direct vocabulary instruction of high frequency words increases students' reading fluency and comprehension.

Statement of the Hypothesis

Does the direct vocabulary instruction of high frequency words increase students' fluency and comprehension?

Definition of Terms

- Decoding: ability to accurately sound out a word
- Direct Instruction: process in which students are taught the subject matter directly
- High Frequency Words: words that occur often in our written language and words that should be recognized quickly by our student population
- Reading Comprehension: to read for meaning.
- Reading Fluency: the ability to read smoothly and easily at a steady pace with good phrasing and expression
- Vocabulary: ability to identify the meaning of a word and the context in which it is used.
- Word Recognition: broad term that encompasses the many ways students can access print: decoding or sounding out, recognizing prefixes, suffixes, and root words; looking for small words inside big words; knowing words by sight; using the context to figure out meaning that leads to word identification

Variables

The independent variable in this study is the direct instruction of high frequency vocabulary words. The control group (Group A & Group B) received no prior direct instruction of high frequency vocabulary words before being pre-assessed on their reading skills. Therefore, student's individual pre-assessment scores from Group A and Group B were used as control data for comparison. The dependent variable is the decoding, fluency, and comprehension scores of each student's pre and post-assessment scores. Control variables of this study included participants who were ninth grade alternative Bridge students and who were placed in a remedial language arts class with the same teacher that immediate school year. Moderator variables that might have affected the outcome of this study include students' daily attendance and individual differences in reading ability and effort.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This research study compared the pre-assessment decoding, fluency, and comprehension scores of Group A and Group B to that of their post-assessment scores to determine if there had been an increase in their fluency and comprehension. The limitations of the study included a small sample of students from remedial language arts classes, inconsistent daily attendance, individual differences in reading ability and effort, limited amount of time to work with students one-on-one, and staying consistent within the allotted amount of time reserved for full group instruction on high frequency words.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

To enroll at the Bridge ALC Program, students must qualify under two or more stated criteria from the Minnesota High School Incentives Guidelines List. 75% of the at-risk student population at Bridge qualifies under the category of school failure and is lagging behind academically. Research data suggests that at-risk students, such as the students enrolled at Bridge, often begin their early school careers academically behind (Engelmann, 1999). As a result of ongoing struggles and failures, they are prevented from climbing the ladder of academic growth on schedule. This delinquency is highly correlated with school failure, particularly the failure to read (Hodgkinson, 1992). In some cases, if at risk students are not demonstrating growth, the school and the community are sometimes at a disadvantage from these costly failures. Special school programming, welfare, and detention services often see a close correlation between the ability to read and not to read. Not surprisingly, many Bridge students and their families have received special services in the past or are presently receiving services.

Although older students have built up experiences, attitudes, reading habits, interests, and needs that distinguish them from younger children, most reading scientists agree that a core linguistic deficit underlies poor reading at all ages (Catts et al., 1999; Shaywitz et al., 1999). At any age, poor readers as a group exhibit weaknesses in phonological processing, word recognition speed, and accuracy. At any age, when an individual's reading comprehension is more impaired than his or her

listening comprehension, inaccurate and slow word recognition is the most likely cause (Shankweiler 1999).

To make matters worse, older students have not practiced reading and often avoid it because it is difficult, slow, and frustrating. This is why it is so challenging to teach struggling older students. Since these students cannot read, they do not like to read. They find it labor intensive and unsatisfying, so they have little reading experience. Then, because they have not read much, they are not familiar with the vocabulary, sentence structure, text organization, and concepts of academic “book” language. Eventually over time, their comprehension skills decrease because they do not read, and they also become poor spellers and poor writers (Moats 2001). According to experts, what usually begins as a phonological and word recognition discrepancy becomes a circulating, incapacitating problem with both spoken and written language.

Vocabulary and Comprehension

Researchers believe there is a strong correlation between a readers’ vocabulary knowledge and their reading comprehension. If a student develops a strong vocabulary base, they are better equipped to understand the material they read, as well as function more productively in society. Furthermore, reading experts now believe that more time and effort needs to be devoted to implementing vocabulary and comprehension strategies in content area classes other than just language arts or English classes.

Word Recognition

Word recognition is the foundation of the reading process. As routine as it may seem, each instance of word recognition is an amazing achievement. It begins with a pattern of light and dark cast onto the retina by reflection from the printed page; for the skilled reader, it ends less than a quarter of a second later and almost always with the correct word. In this time, the reader must find the word's meaning in memory, for only there is word form associated with meaning; he must locate a single item in a mental dictionary containing tens of thousands of entries (Gough 1984).

Many of these entries include words that are otherwise known as high frequency words. High frequency words play an important role in the recognition of words. According to reading experts, approximately 5,000 of these words make up 90% of the words in texts (Johns and Lenski 2001). Experts suggest it is important that students learn to read and spell these high frequency words as soon as possible. Although we cannot study word recognition directly in the classroom, we can have a reader perform a task in which we can get a response and then measure that response. For example, we could ask the reader to read a word aloud (to name it) and then measure the reader's performance in this task (Gough 1984).

Reading Fluency and Direct Instruction

Sound-symbol associations and word recognition are usually fast and automatic in good readers. They use little conscious attention when they identify words. Third graders typically read more than 100 words per minute; adults typically read more than 300 words per minute. Poor readers are usually too slow, even after

they become accurate. Slowness generally reflects a lack of practice with reading (Moats 2001).

Poor readers generally do not develop whole-word recognition but instead decode each word as they are seeing it for the first time. Older students can usually increase their speed with a great deal of practice at several levels: sound-symbol association, word reading, and text reading at an easy level. Quick speed drills, conducted as challenge games to achieve a goal, can build automatic recognition of syllables and morphemes (Moats 2001). If instruction includes oral reading in small groups, reading with a tape-recording, choral reading, or rereading familiar text, students are better equipped to become fluent readers.

It is the intent of this action research to demonstrate a correlation between the direct vocabulary instruction of high frequency words and how it affects students' fluency and comprehension.

CHAPTER III: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Overview

The methods and procedures used in this research were chosen with the intention of demonstrating a strong correlation between the direct vocabulary instruction of high frequency words and that of students' reading fluency and comprehension. Various data was collected in this study in order to provide a wide range of information to analyze.

Research Design

The students chosen for this research study were comprised from two groups: Group A (2003-04 school year) and Group B (2004-05 school year). Students who either did not complete the 2003-04 school year, or who entered the 2004-05 school year late were not included in the research data. Data collection for this study consisted of four methods: reciting from a list of high frequency words, reading a short pre and post-assessment passage which included recording their time and their reading miscues, asking them two comprehension questions from both pre and post reading assessment passages, and anecdotal notes of student comments and participation recorded during the testing period.

Subjects

The participants selected for this action research project were students from the second hour language arts class (2003-04 school year) and from the first hour language arts class (2004-05 school year). Both groups of students were identified as struggling readers who needed remedial instruction in vocabulary, decoding, fluency,

and in comprehension development. The total number of students included in the study was 14: 4 boys and 10 girls. Of this total number, 3 students received special education services, 1 student was on a 504 Plan, and 3 students had previously completed ESOL Level III. In addition, students who either did not complete the 2003-04 school year, or who entered the 2004-05 school year later were excluded from this study.

Instruments

Three out of the four data collection tools used were taken directly from Jerry L. John's *Basic Reading Inventory* reading resource. The first tool was a grade 8 word list - *List A 3717* (Appendix A) which was used for pre and post assessment oral reading fluency with individual students. The second and third data collection tools were *Passage B 3717I* (Appendix B) for pre-assessment passage reading and comprehension and *Passage C 3717* (Appendix C) for post-assessment and comprehension. The last collection tool used was a qualitative assessment in the form of anecdotal notes (Appendix D).

Validity and Reliability Measures

Based on the format of these formal assessments and the overall consistency of the assessor, little or no error should result when testing a student. However, if there was more than one assessor testing the same student simultaneously, there may be a difference in interpretations of a student's pronunciation of a word and/or the identification of miscues while completing a running record. Qualitative assessments, such as anecdotal notes, may be considered less valid since one assessor may view a

situation or a student comment entirely different than another assessor might in the same situation.

Reliability is achieved when the results of a study are repeated and the outcome is consistent with that of the first study. In this study, the same data collection tools and procedures could be used to obtain similar results within a student population such as the one tested in this study.

Procedures

During the course of the testing period, individual students were randomly given a newspaper with a variety of words highlighted within the text of the paper. If a student was selected, they were responsible for reading one of the articles which contained a highlighted word within the text. When they arrived to class the next day, they were to pronounce one of the target vocabulary words and read it in context as it appeared in the newspaper article. The student was also responsible for putting the word on a 3X5 card with a definition on the back of the card. All students recorded each word, its sentence, and its definition on a word diary data sheet (Appendix E). As part of the instruction, lessons were prepared focusing on either prefix/roots/suffixes or the phonics/pronunciation for the targeted vocabulary words chosen that day. After each lesson, the students' 3X5 cards went into a Word Jar. After 10 words had accumulated in the word jar, the class reviewed the cards. One student would pull a word out of the word jar and pronounce it. Then s/he would toss a koosh ball to someone else in the class. The student who caught the koosh ball would then have to give the meaning of the word and/or use the word in a sentence.

The pre assessment data for Group A was collected in April of 2004 and the

post assessment data was collected in June of 2004. Anecdotal notes were collected during the three weeks that Group A's testing period took place. The pre assessment data for Group B was collected in September of 2004 and the post assessment data was collected in October of 2004. Again, the anecdotal notes were collected during the three weeks that Group B's testing period took place. The testing period for both groups was three weeks in length.

Conclusion

The methods and procedures set forth by this research study are intended to provide both qualitative and quantitative data. This researcher intends to demonstrate a correlation between the direct vocabulary instruction of high frequency words and the increase in students' reading fluency and comprehension.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Throughout the course of this study, students were encouraged and challenged to participate fully in this project. Students were informed of the overall objectives to this study and most agreed they wanted to increase their current vocabulary base and become more effective readers. The overall purpose of this study was to determine if there was a correlation between the direct instruction of high frequency vocabulary words and the increase of students' reading fluency and comprehension.

Independent Variables

Most of the independent variables in this study were consistent: both Group A and Group B participants were all ninth grade alternative students, each struggled in their reading, and each was placed in a remedial language arts class for the immediate school year. Although the high frequency vocabulary words and the daily lessons differed between Group A and Group B, each word was selected from the front page of the Rochester *Post Bulletin* and/or the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* and the daily lessons were similar in nature.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable also remained the same for both groups of students. Each student was given an opportunity to participate in the word study through active involvement. Involvement such as selecting a newspaper article to read, reporting back to the group which highlighted word they selected, defining the meaning in context, recording the information in their word diary, and lastly participating in the review games.

Control Variable

The control variable used for Group A and Group B was each student's individual pre-assessments. These controls were chosen due to the fact that students in the previous 2002-03 school year were not formally assessed in the classroom as each of these groups of students had been.

Overall Findings

Based on each groups' individual scores from their pre-assessments (reciting 20 high frequency words, reading a short pre-assessment passage in which they were timed and a running record was completed, and answering 2 comprehension questions from the passage) and from their post-assessments (completing the same as above with the exception of reading a different short post-assessment passage and answering 2 comprehension questions from that passage), it was determined that overall a struggling reader's fluency and comprehension does increase or remains stable when they receive direct instruction of high frequency words.

In the first group tested (Group A), 100% of the students demonstrated growth in correctly decoding the twenty high frequency words (Appendix F). Of these students, 86% of the students increased their reading fluency time and decreased the number of mistakes in their reading (Appendix G). In the comprehension assessment, all participants in Group A remained at the same rate since they each had correctly identified both comprehension questions pre and post assessment (Appendix H).

In the second group tested (Group B), students also demonstrated 100% growth in decoding the high frequency words (Appendix F). From this group of

students, 86% of them increased their reading fluency time and decreased the number of mistakes in their reading (Appendix G). In the area of comprehension, 43% of the students remained at the same rate (either correctly identifying both comprehension questions pre or post assessment), 43% demonstrated a growth in comprehension, and 14% of the students showed a decrease in comprehension (Appendix H).

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

When subjects were selected for this research study, students who would best benefit from reading instruction were given first opportunity to participate. Although other ninth grade students from other language arts classes could have taken part in the study, students from Group A and Group B needed immediate direct reading instruction, and the study of high frequency vocabulary words proved to be an effective strategy in helping them increase their reading fluency and comprehension.

Overall, this research study demonstrated a correlation between students' reading fluency and comprehension increasing as a result of the direct vocabulary instruction of high frequency words. Of the 14 participants (includes students from both Group A and Group B), 100% demonstrated growth in decoding, 86% increased their reading fluency time and decreased the number of mistakes in their reading, and 93% either increased their comprehension or remained at the same rate. Furthermore, although there were some participants who either stayed at the same comprehension rate or who showed a slight decrease in reading fluency and comprehension, the majority of both Group A and Group B showed an increased growth in their reading skills.

Conclusions

As a result of the findings from this study, it was determined that the implementation of direct vocabulary instruction of high frequency words proved to be an effective tool in increasing students' reading fluency and comprehension. In

addition, students were introduced to new and/or existing reading strategies that will enable them to further develop their reading skills and help them to become lifelong learners. Furthermore, it was also determined that the emphasis on other reading components such as phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies should also be embedded in reading instruction.

Recommendations

As a future plan of action, certain aspects of this study should be modified such as the number of participants, the timeline of the study, and the method of instruction. First, a larger sample of participants should be used for a study of this magnitude. Given the limited amount of enrollment for the Bridge Program, both struggling and non struggling readers should take part. Secondly, the timeline of the study should be extended to approximately six weeks versus three weeks. This would allow for a greater amount of time for more effective scaffolding instruction, and would increase the overall participation rate for students due to nonattendance. The last recommendation that should be included would be to incorporate individualized instruction time along with the group instruction for students participating in the study.

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Appendix A

1. dwell
2. slogan
3. knapsack
4. administration
5. gangster
6. flatter
7. incredible
8. algebra
9. bachelor
10. vocabulary
11. longitude
12. saliva
13. peninsula
14. monarch
15. feminine
16. quench
17. competition
18. disinfectant
19. ambitious
20. orchid

Word List A 3717

Appendix B

Black Out

The soft buzz of the computer relaxed Anthony as he worked on his yearly report for his anxious employer. He typed the final sentence, sighed in relief, and saved the computer file. The office lights flickered, the computer screen went black and New York City was silent. Sirens sound in the area. Flashlights guided the impatient crowd to sunlight twenty floors down. An hour later, the police chief announced through his loud speaker, “All is clear.” The workers filed into the elevators like clockwork, returning to their projects. One observer commented, “All in a day’s work in New York City.”

Passage B 3717

Appendix C

Capture and Freedom

One of the most beloved tales is of the princess and a knight. The princess, shackled to a rock, caught the eye of the wandering knight. He galloped over and, with a single stroke of his sword, freed her from the iron chain. Taking her hand, he led her away from the dreadful confinement of the rock. While relaxing in a sunny meadow, he comforted her with reassuring words. The princess told him that she had been seized by pirates. These pirates had brought her to this savage island as a peace offering to the terrible monsters of the sea.

Passage C 3717

Appendix D

- This is hard. Why do we have to do this?
- Wouldn't it just be easier to give us the words and let us look them up in a dictionary?
- Is the other class doing this, or is it just our group?
- I can sometimes sound out words, but it is usually really hard to do it.
- What do I do if I think I know what the word might mean, but I don't know for sure?
- I think that word must mean around because it has the root word *circum* in it.
- I don't understand what you mean when you say to use context clues to help you figure out what the word means.

- How do you sound out a word you do not know how to say?
- I finally get it. You have to look for little pieces within the word that you might know.
- Do all words have more than one meaning?
- How can I remember it?
- Now I get it. We had that root word about a month ago in class. Does it have something to do with time?
- I see that word in my book all the time.

Anecdotal Notes – small sample

Appendix E

Word Diary

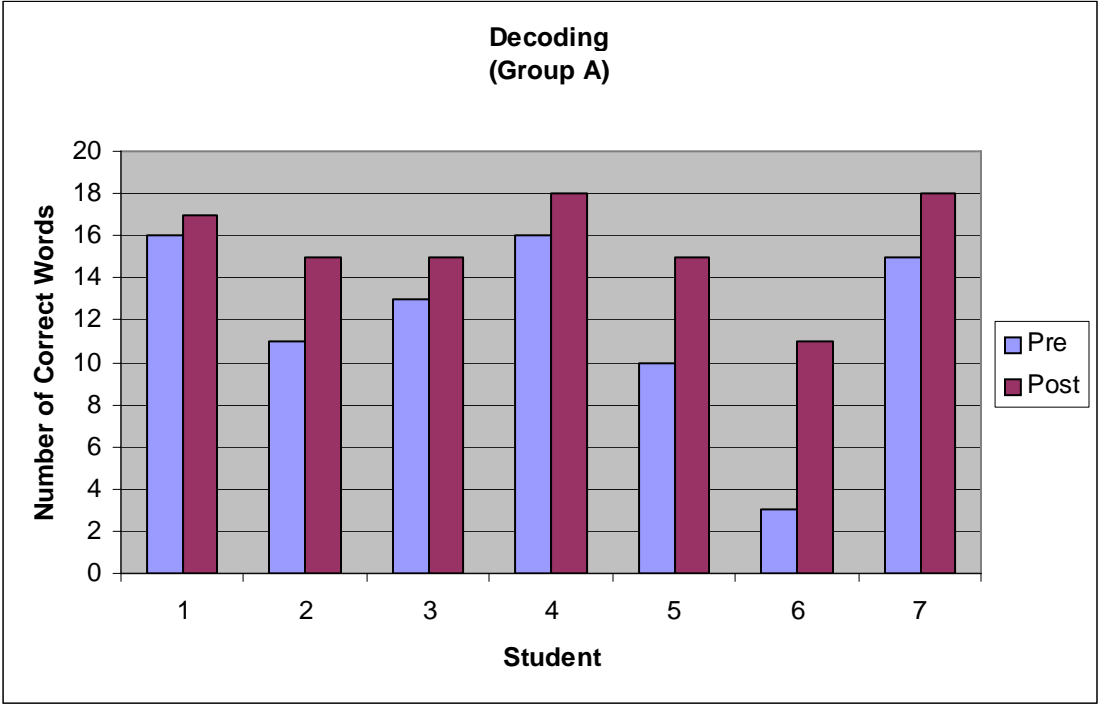
Name _____

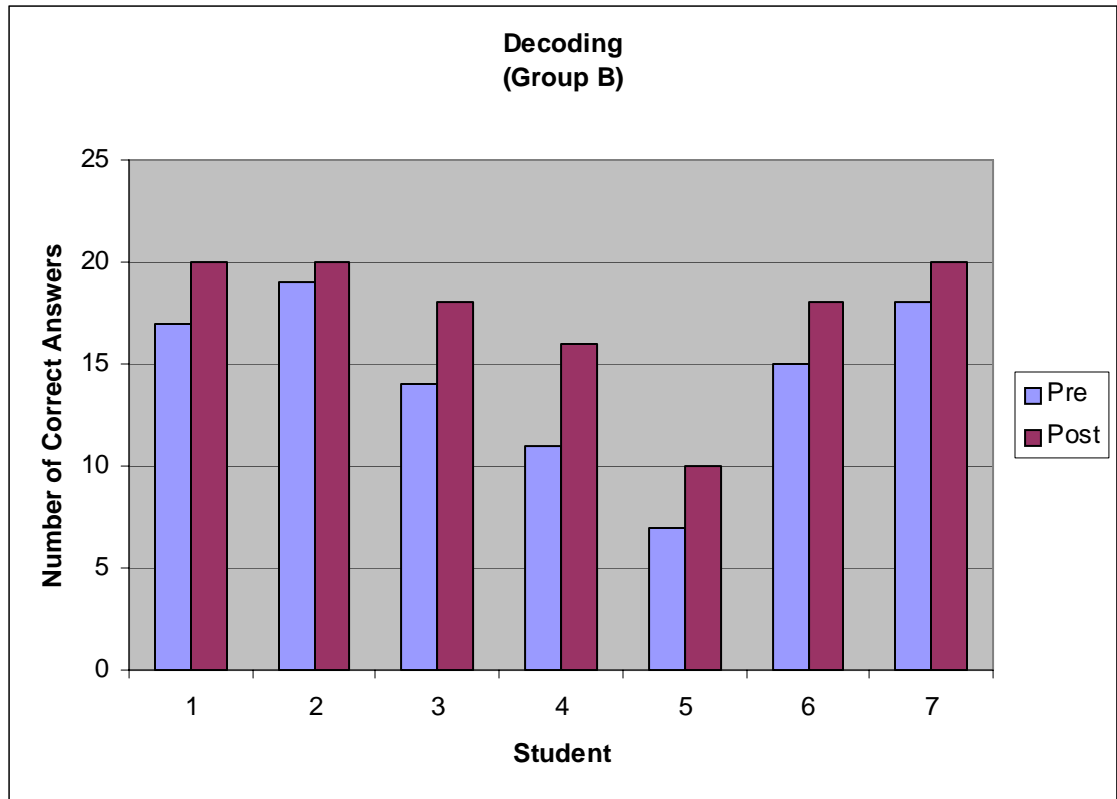
Hour _____ Date _____ to _____

Date	Unfamiliar Word	Context: Sentence in which you found the word	Guess/Definition
	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
	5.		
	6.		

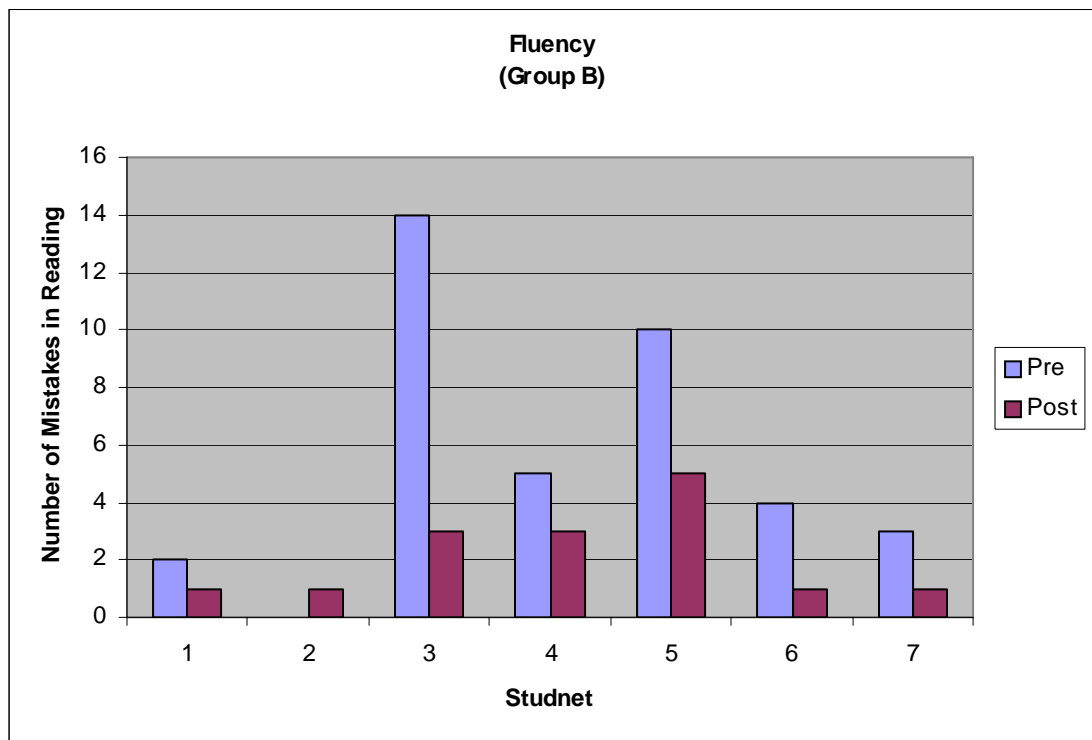
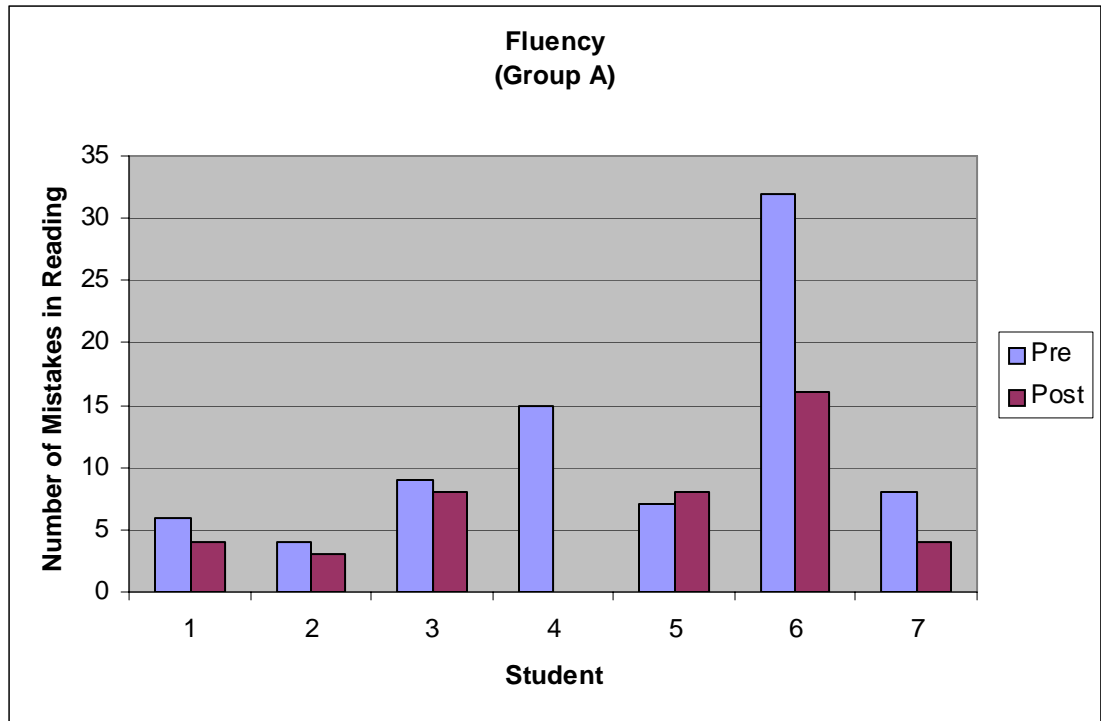
	7.		
	8.		
	9.		
	10.		

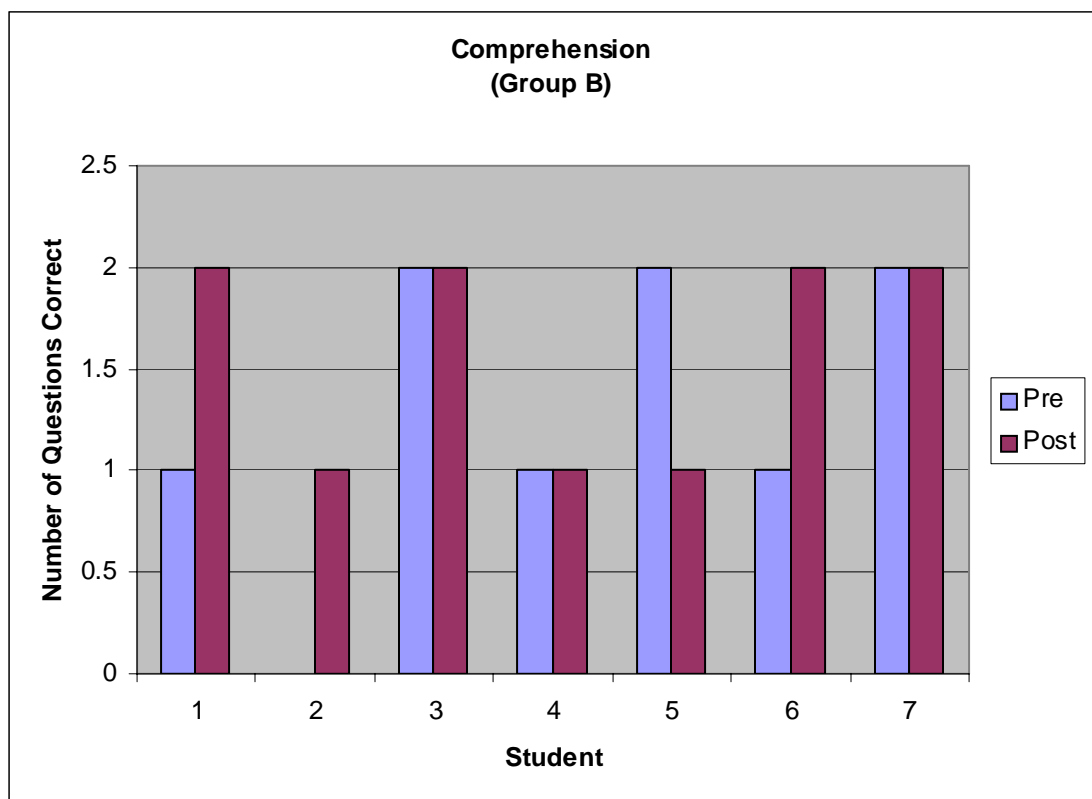
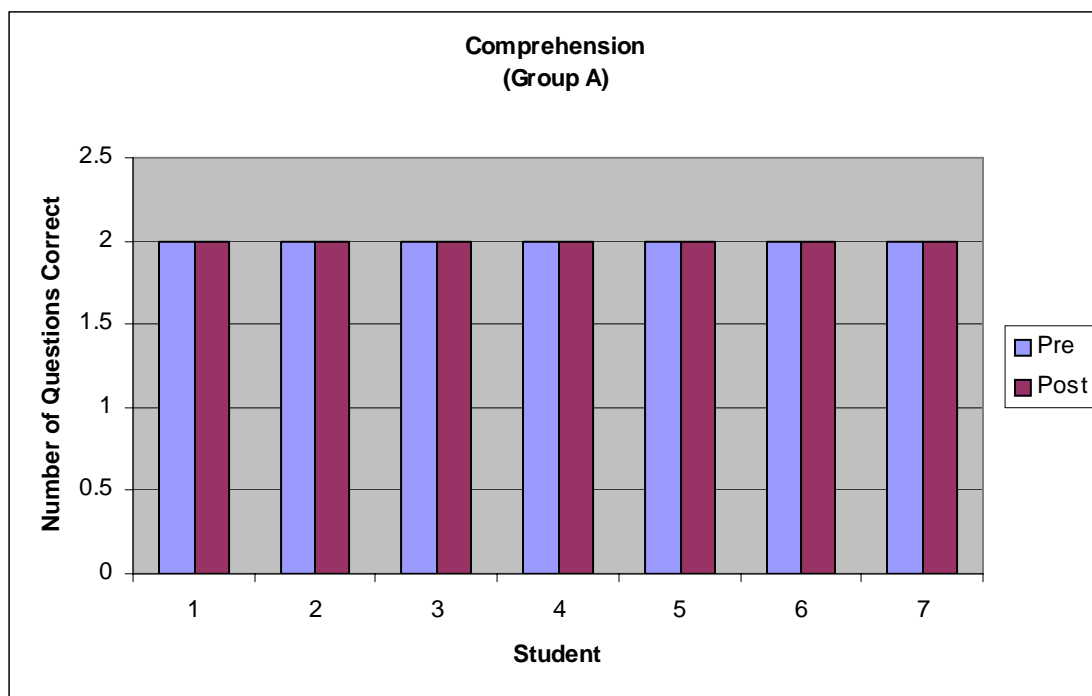
Appendix F





Appendix G





WILL THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A GUIDED READING
PROGRAM IMPROVE RUNNING RECORD SCORES?

By

Elizabeth Winters

B.S. St. Cloud State University, 1999

A capstone submitted to the Graduate School of Winona State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Science

Department of Education

December 2004

This capstone entitled:

Will the implementation of a guided reading program improve running record scores?

Written by Elizabeth Winters

Has been approved for Winona State Department of Education by

Molly Thorson

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Erin Foster

Darren Thompson

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Susanne Griffin-Ziebart, Resource Person

The final copy of this capstone has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the people who played a role in my successful completion of this program.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Title Page.....	i
Committee Approval Page	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Abstract.....	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Need for the Study.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Statement of the Hypothesis	5
Definition of Terms	5
Variables	6
Limitations and Delimitations of the Study	7
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	9
III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES	13
Overview.....	13
Design	13
Selection of Subjects	14
Instrumentation	15
Validity Measures	15
Reliability Measures	16
Field Procedures.....	16
Conclusion.....	17
IV. RESULTS	18
Introduction	18
Discussion	18

V.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	28
	Summary.....	28
	Conclusions.....	28
	Recommendations.....	29
	References.....	31
	APPENDIX A:	32
	APPENDIX B:	33
	APPENDIX C:	34
	APPENDIX D:	35

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1

Individual Levels of Growth 2002/2003.	19
---	----

Table 2

Individual Levels of Growth 2003/2004	20
---	----

Table 3

Median of Running Records 2002/2003 and 2003/2004	21
---	----

Table 4

Mode of Running Records 2002/2003 and 2003/2004	21
---	----

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1

Mean Running Record Scores	22
----------------------------------	----

Figure 2

ELL Mean Running Record Scores	23
--------------------------------------	----

Figure 3

The Achievement Gap	24
---------------------------	----

Figure 4

End of Year Mean Running Record Scores	25
--	----

Figure 5

Mean Running Record Scores Boys versus Girls	26
--	----

Figure 6

Spring 02/03 Year End Goal	27
----------------------------------	----

Figure 7

Spring 03/04 Year End Goal	27
----------------------------------	----

Winters, Elizabeth (M.S., Education)

Will the implementation of a guided reading program improve running record scores?

Capstone directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman

ABSTRACT

An action research project was conducted to determine if the implementation of a guided reading program in a first grade classroom would improve running record scores. Below average student performance and an achievement gap between white and minority students were the motivators for this study. Research on guided reading and collaboration with first grade colleagues took place during the 2002/2003 school year. A structured guided reading program was put into place during the 2003/2004 school year. Data was collected using running record assessments during 2002/2003 and 2003/2004. There were significant increases in average levels of running records after guided reading was adopted and implemented.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Teaching a child how to read is a complicated process. It requires extensive knowledge of all of the components of the language arts. Teachers must be willing to closely examine each student's individual development and progression to see where deficiencies lie and then try to address them in specific lessons. Each individual has unique abilities and needs. Needless to say, finding a way to reach every child is a challenging task. Educators must be committed to continuing their own self development and determining best practices for students.

In past years, reading has been taught in homeroom classrooms using the Harcourt Brace reading curriculum. Teachers included read aloud, independent reading and word study skills in their reading lessons. Using the Harcourt Brace reading curriculum provided teachers with whole group reading lessons. The problem with exclusively using whole group instruction is all of the texts are at what is considered to be grade level. Classrooms are filled with students representing a range of ability levels. When students are asked to read text that is one level, many students who struggle become lost and students functioning at higher levels become bored. Students suffer because they are not allowed to move forward at their own pace.

Many students were reaching expected first grade outcomes by the end of the year, but there was a significant percentage of the student population that was not. Particularly, students who were English Language Learners and of diverse backgrounds were not meeting year end goals at the same levels as their white peers.

Similar trends can be seen, not only locally, but also on state and national levels. With increased pressure on teachers to close the achievement gap, while raising the bar for all, some alternative method of reaching students had to be explored. Throughout the 2002/2003 school year, teachers began to be introduced to the practice of guided reading through conferences, courses, and book studies.

During the 2002/2003 school year, reading teachers at Franklin Elementary wrote and received a grant to fund a leveled library that would provide materials to support guided reading instruction in the classrooms. The grant was accepted on the condition that all teachers in the building would implement a guided reading program in their classroom. The Rochester Public School District also began requiring some form of guided reading, as well as Harcourt Brace reading instruction, from teachers during the 2003/2004 school year. To better serve the needs of the student population and to meet the mandatory changes in instruction, guided reading was implemented in the 2003/2004 school year.

A. Need for the Study

The need for a study came about due to mandatory changes in instruction. If changes in instruction are required to be made, it is beneficial for research to be conducted and data to be collected that support or refute that change.

Franklin Elementary School has a diverse population of students. Students arrive at school with a range of literacy experiences, as well as, language, family, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This study will help in determining what methods of reading instruction best meet the needs of a diverse student population.

B. Statement of the Problem

Students enter the school environment with a variety of experiences. Some may have had formal pre-school education, while others may have never even picked up a book. Many students come to school unprepared to learn everyday. They may be hungry, tired, or preoccupied with family issues. Teachers must find creative ways to compensate for these deficiencies and ensure that students achieve success while they are at school.

Franklin's diverse student population helps in generating a warm and accepting school environment, but also creates some challenges for educators in finding ways to meet the varied student needs. Franklin has higher populations by percentage of Black, Hispanic, and English Language Learner students than the state and Rochester Public School District (Minnesota Department of Education, 2004). Trends in academic achievement can be seen on state, district, and school standardized tests. The 2003 Nations Report Card showed a significant achievement gap between white and minority students in the area of reading in the state of Minnesota as well as at Franklin Elementary School (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). At Franklin, standardized tests given in the third grade showed that 56% of ELL students were performing below grade level, while only 20% of non ELL students were below grade level (Minnesota Department of Education, 2004). Thirty four percent of black students as compared to 18% of white students were performing below grade level (Department of Education, 2004). Overall, 31% of Franklin's fourth graders are performing below basic proficiency levels in reading

(Minnesota Department of Education, 2004). Franklin has a higher percentage of students that are achieving below grade level than the Rochester Public Schools and the state of Minnesota (Minnesota Department of Education).

Examination of classroom data also revealed deficits in reading achievement. Thirty eight percent of students were not reaching end of year expectations on running record assessments. An achievement gap was observed when comparing white and minority student data. End of year assessments showed that minority students were considerably underachieving compared to their white peers. There was an average of nine levels of difference between white and minority students.

Students' needs were not being met by the Harcourt Brace reading curriculum alone. It was predicted that our school would be cited for not making adequate yearly progress on standardized tests in the student sub-groups of African Americans, free and reduced lunch, and English language learners. While first graders are not tested, first grade is where the foundation is laid. What students learn in first grade is the beginning. If they fall behind, it will be more difficult for them to achieve academic success in years to come.

A change was necessary. New methods of teaching children to read needed to be explored. Teachers needed to find some way of reaching the children who were from diverse backgrounds, as well as the students who were far above and far below grade level. Would the practice of guided reading help raise the bar for all students? Would the implementation of guided reading improve running record scores?

C. Purpose of the Study

This research is being conducted in order to determine if the implementation of a guided reading program positively impacts students' ability to read text as assessed by running records. Data is being gathered to support the hypothesis that student running record scores will improve. As the achievement gap continues to grow, it is the responsibility of educators to determine best methods in teaching. The results of this research will help to ascertain if guided reading is the best practice in teaching children how to read. Results will also be considered when developing and planning a reading program for future school years.

D. Statement of the Hypothesis

Students who receive guided reading instruction will score better on running record assessments than students who did not receive guided reading instruction.

E. Definition of Terms

- Guided Reading- Guided reading is a context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty.
- Running record- A running record is a tool for coding, scoring, and analyzing a child's precise reading behaviors.
- ELL (English Language Learners)-Students who receive English as a second language service.
- Leveled library- A collection of multiple copies of fiction and non-fiction books. The books are organized by level and skills. Faculty members are able to check out books to use in guided reading instruction.

- Achievement gap- The disparity between the academic achievements of different groups of students.
- Word building- Hands on activities that require children to use limited letter tiles to build words that revolve around a particular phonetic skill.
- Word family- Words that contain the same combination of letters, sometimes referred to as word chunks; often found in rhyming words
- Basal- A series of stories that are geared toward whole group instruction at a specific grade level and usually include workbooks, activities, and a teacher's manual
- Harcourt Brace- The basal reading series/curriculum adopted by the Rochester Public School District

C. Variables

Independent

The independent variable is the new guided reading program that was implemented.

Dependent

Running record levels are the dependent variables.

Control

All other aspects of reading instruction remained consistent with past years. The only change was the implementation of guided reading. The subjects that were chosen for the study were all first grade students between the ages of six and seven.

Moderator

Data was collected from two different sample groups. Students did not all begin at the same levels in the beginning of the year. Attendance was a variable to consider. Many students miss school for a variety of reasons, such as illness or vacation. Some students were pulled out of guided reading instruction for remedial reading instruction, as well as for other academic and social programs. Rochester Public School District boundary changes had an effect on student population at Franklin Elementary School.

F. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Ben Franklin has a very diverse student population. The demographics of Franklin differ from the state of Minnesota and the Rochester Public School District as a whole. Franklin has higher student populations of ELL, racially diverse, and Free/Reduced Lunch students (Minnesota Department of Education, 2004). Participants of this study had diverse backgrounds, academic abilities, and primary languages. Data was collected from a small sample size.

Guided reading is being implemented in all four first grade classrooms at Franklin Elementary. Students may receive reading instruction from any one of the four first grade teachers. While there is a set curriculum that is taught, there are four different individuals that teach in four different ways. On occasion, guided reading instruction is cancelled due to mandatory school wide and/or grade level events. For example, field trips or spirit assemblies.

Another limitation to be considered is the wide range of family and home situations that impact a student's ability to learn. Students often come to school hungry, tired, and unprepared for the day. Student attendance is also a factor that

impacts learning. Through the school year, students are, at times, not in attendance due to illness, family request, or unexcused reasons.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Teachers are continually being faced with additional challenges in the classroom. More and more is being asked and expected of educators. An emphasis on rigorous standards and testing can be felt by educators, families, and students. Reading instruction is at the forefront of these demands.

Students come to school with a variety of backgrounds and pre-school experiences. Many children come to school hungry, tired and unprepared for the day. Educators must find a way to circumvent these challenges and reach all students.

According to the 2003 Nation's Report Card on reading, white students had higher averages than black students (National Center for Education Statistics). Similar trends could be seen on a state level. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, 34% of third grade black students were performing below grade level, while only 18% of white students were below grade level (Minnesota Department of Education, 2004). When looking at English Language Learner scores, 56% were achieving below grade level, while only 20% of non-ELL students were below grade level (Minnesota Department of Education, 2004). After examining classroom data, achievement gaps between minority and white students were also observed.

Many questions come up when current student achievement in reading is analyzed. Are students who achieve at lower levels being reached with current practices? How can the achievement gap be closed? What are the best ways to accommodate reading instruction for English Language Learners? What research based practices would benefit the student population at Franklin Elementary? Is it

possible to implement a curriculum that is rigorous and stimulating for students of all ability levels?

In the past, students at Franklin Elementary received their primary reading instruction from teachers using Harcourt Brace, a basal series based curriculum. The Harcourt Brace curriculum emphasized shared reading and whole group instruction techniques. While these methods benefited some students, school wide scores indicated that students were achieving at lower levels were not being reached because the curriculum was at a higher level than their ability. There was also a group of children who were achieving at a higher level than the curriculum and would frequently get bored with what was being presented to them. The methods of teaching reading were not meeting the diverse academic needs of the students.

Guided reading is a context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of effective strategies for processing text at increasing levels of difficulty (Reading Language Arts, 2004). The National Reading Panel conducted research and concluded that guided oral reading is important for developing reading fluency (Report of the National Reading Panel, 2004). Guided reading helped students across a wide range of grade levels to learn to recognize words, helped them to read accurately and easily, and helped them to comprehend what they read (Report of the National Reading Panel, 2004).

Guided reading is an instructional approach that involves a teacher working with a small group of children who demonstrate similar reading behaviors and can all read similar texts. The teacher selects a text that is easy enough for children to read with skillful teacher support, but also offers challenges and opportunities for problem solving. The teacher chooses selections that help children expand their strategies (Pinnell, 2000).

Repeated and monitored guided oral reading improves overall reading achievement (National Right to Read Foundation, 2003). The beneficial results of guided reading practices apply to all students, good readers as well as struggling. A goal of guided reading is to maintain the self confidence and motivation of struggling readers and to provide as much instructional level reading as possible (Cunningham, Hall & Sigmon, 1999). Many students with lower ability levels lacked confidence because they were not exposed to positive literacy experiences. When students are forced to try to read books that are too difficult for them, they become frustrated and feel unsuccessful. Students need to have the opportunity to read books at their level. Guided reading realizes many of the objectives of a differentiated classroom as described by Carol Ann Tomlinson. For example, student differences are the basis for instruction, assessment is ongoing, multiple materials are used, and the focus is on development of self reliant learners (Tomlinson, 1999). It is not a “one size fits all” approach.

Teachers need to offer guidance during reading instruction. Modeling good reading strategies and skills, and providing direct reading instruction helps students work toward independent reading (Pinnell, 2000). Using a guided reading program, individual readers have the opportunity to develop and use reading strategies so they can read progressively difficult levels of text independently (Pinnell, 2000).

Guided reading increases student problem solving skills (Reading Language Arts, 2004). It gives the students the opportunity to develop and use strategies in a small group setting that is encouraging and supportive. The small group allows the educator to give individual students attention and feedback. Students greatly benefit

from this personal instruction time with the teacher. While small groups are meeting with the teacher, other students in the classroom are actively engaged in seat work or literacy centers that reinforce previously learned reading strategies.

Guided reading provided teachers with the chance to address students' individual needs at their levels. Teachers are able to observe and confer with students in a small group. Constant evaluation of student progress should be taking place using teacher observation and running records (Reading Language Arts, 2004). Running record assessments help to determine student strengths and weaknesses (Pinnell, 2000). Assessment results also help to place students in groups. A requirement of guided reading is to keep grouping fluid and flexible (Reading Language Arts, 2004). Groups are based on the instructional level and mastered reading strategies of the student.

It is the objective of this study to further understand the benefits of guided reading. Evidence gathered in this study will help to support or refute the implementation of guided reading.

III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

A. Overview

Initial student data was collected throughout the 2002/2003 school year. Throughout the 2002/2003 and continuing into the 2003/2004 school year, research on guided reading was carried out. Over the summer and into the fall of 2003, four first grade teachers developed a guided reading schedule and curriculum to put in to place in classrooms during the 2003/2004 school year. Data was collected on student progress throughout the 2003/2004 school year. The student data that was collected was evaluated and conclusions were drawn in order to determine what role guided reading should play in future reading programs at Franklin.

B. Design

During the first half of this study, 2002/2003 school year, students received whole group reading instruction using the District's reading curriculum. Other components of the reading program consisted of read aloud, independent reading, and word study. Data was collected on student performance in reading using running record assessments. In the second half of this study, the 2003/2004 school year, students received guided reading instruction, as well as all of the abovementioned components of reading instruction. Students received guided reading instruction for one hour a day, five days a week.

Using running record assessments, teacher observation, and daily work all Franklin first grade students were placed into four separate groups of approximately twenty children. These groups were assigned to one of the four first grade teachers at Franklin. Each teacher then further analyzed student levels and skills and divided

their twenty students into approximately five groups of four to six children. Guided reading instruction was provided in a small group setting using these established leveled groups.

Guided reading time was devoted to teaching students reading skills and strategies by using books at their instructional level, as determined by running records. Skills and strategies were reinforced at literacy centers during the guided reading period each day. The guided reading curriculum also included word building and word family lessons.

C. Selection of Subjects

Subjects for this study were selected from a first grade classroom that included English Language Learners, students who were eligible for free and reduced lunch, and special education students. Participants for this action research were first grade students in attendance during the 2002/2003 and the 2003/2004 school years at Franklin Elementary School in Rochester, Minnesota. During the 2002/2003 school year, a class size of 16 participated in this study. During the 2003/2004 school year, a class size of 20 participated in this study.

A total of 36 subjects contributed to this study. 22 of the participants were white students, while 14 were minority students. 12 out of the 36 subjects were English Language Learners. 14 of the participants were girls and 22 of the participants were boys. For the purposes of this study, transient student data was not included in data analysis. Only students who were present at the start of the school year and who were still in attendance at the end of the year were included as contributors to this study.

D. Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study were leveled books and running record assessments. Instruments were used on a daily basis to carry out lessons and on a quarterly basis to collect data used in this study.

Leveled books are multiple copies of books that are leveled according to difficulty of text and reading skills incorporated in the text. Leveled books were used in daily guided reading lessons with students. Each student was able to use their own copy of a book at their level. Books were read and lessons were taught using books in small groups. Franklin has a leveled book room that allows staff to check out books that range from kindergarten to sixth grade levels. The leveled library provided first graders with the opportunity to have access to books they otherwise might not have had and gave teachers wonderful resources to use in lessons.

Running record assessments are a set of standard texts that range from level 1 to 24. Students were assessed using these leveled texts once a quarter. The running records assessments used in this study came from Reading Recovery materials developed by Marie Clay.

E. Validity Measures

The design of this study involved utilizing running record assessments to evaluate a student's ability to read text. A running record assessment requires a teacher to sit next to a child while he/she reads a leveled text. The teacher and the student are looking at the same text. As the students reads, the teachers records accurate reading and mismatches. If students read the text with 90% accuracy, they are considered to be proficient at that level. Running records are generally valid due

to the fact that each leveled text and the method of recording student responses are standard.

Running records are generally valid tools to assess a student's ability to read text, however, as with any classroom assessment, they do contain an element of subjectivity. Even though there are specific guidelines that should be followed while administering a running record, some teachers may not follow these guidelines. For example, a teacher may use verbal reinforcement or may give a student a clue that could effect running record results. Home environment and student attitude on the day of testing could also impact the outcome of assessments. Although these variables exist, running records were the most valid tool to assess reading achievement for this study. Running records are far more valid than simply observing a student read or using a survey to attempt to determine reading levels.

F. Reliability Measures

Data for this particular action research was collected over a two year period. Over those two years, running records were collected in a consistent environment using the same testing materials. The data that was collected for this action research could be used in future studies and comparisons of student progress.

G. Field Procedures

Students were assessed using running records on a quarterly basis during the 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 school years. Running record assessments allow the teacher to monitor a student's progress in reading over time. All assessments were given in a one on one setting using Reading Recovery materials developed by Marie Clay. The scale of running record levels is A to 24. Levels A and B are considered

to be pre-reading levels, level A being the lower of the two. After level B, the scale continues on from one to twenty four. The expected first grade outcome is level sixteen. Level 24 is considered to be end of second grade reading level. For the purposes of calculating data in this study, levels A and B were measured as level 0. Beginning and end of year data was analyzed to determine if improvements in student performance could be observed after the implementation of guided reading.

H. Conclusion

Teaching children how to read is a complex task. A teacher needs to be devoted to exploring and researching various methods to ensure the success of students. This action research was intended to utilize student data to encourage or discourage the adoption of a new practice of teaching students how to read. Over the two years spent researching and implementing guided reading, overall student performance on running record assessments improved.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Introduction

The data for this study was collected from two groups of first grade students. Comparisons between the two sets of data were made. Evaluation of both student groups' end of the year data was included in the results of this study.

B. Discussion

Throughout the implementation year, small changes were made to improve guided reading instruction. For example, at the start of the year, center groups and groups that were pulled for reading instruction were leveled. As the year progressed, the center groups were reorganized to be heterogeneous, while keeping the reading instruction groups homogeneous. The center groups were then able to have a variety of ability levels present during independent station work. Students who may have struggled with the center tasks, could rely on their center group mates with higher skill levels for support.

This study was necessary to determine whether or not data supported changes in daily reading instruction. Results of the data collected in this study support the hypothesis that guided reading improves running record scores. Overall, students' abilities to read text improved after the implementation of guided reading. Changes in students' abilities to read text as well as other unanticipated effects were also witnessed.

Students were able to confidently master an instructional level before moving on to a more challenging level of text. Students showed higher end of year running record levels when exposed to guided reading methods. Drastic results were seen,

particularly for minority students and English Language Learners. This action research shows that using guided reading to further individualize reading instruction benefits student achievement.

The table below shows a comparison of running record scores from the fall of 2002 to the spring of 2003. Individual levels of growth can be seen for each student. Individual levels of growth show that, on average, 14.2 levels were gained over the school year. Overall averages of student scores in the fall and spring are also shown. The average running record score in the fall of 2002 was 2.1. The average in the spring was 16.3.

Table 1
Individual Levels of Growth 2002/2003

	Fall 02-03 Running Records	Spring 02-03 Running Records	Individual Levels of Growth
Student 1	1	7	6
Student 2	1	16	15
Student 3	3	24	21
Student 4	0	3	3
Student 5	2	24	22
Student 6	1	16	15
Student 7	2	24	22
Student 8	3	24	21
Student 9	4	22	18
Student 10	0	5	5
Student 11	0	3	3
Student 12	14	24	10
Student 13	0	5	5
Student 14	1	24	23
Student 15	1	24	23
Student 16	1	16	15
Average	2.1	16.3	14.2

The table below shows a comparison of running record scores from the fall of 2003 to the spring of 2004. This data from the spring 2004 was collected after guided reading was implemented. Individual levels of growth can be seen for each student. Individual levels of growth show that, on average, 17.7 levels were gained over the school year. Overall averages of student scores in the fall and spring are also shown. The average running record score in the fall of 2003 was 3.2. The average in the spring was 20.9.

Table 2
Individual Levels of Growth 2003/2004

	Fall 03-04 Running Records	Spring 03-04 Running Records	Individual Levels of Growth
Student 1	2	24	22
Student 2	1	24	23
Student 3	2	24	22
Student 4	2	24	22
Student 5	0	12	12
Student 6	2	24	22
Student 7	1	24	23
Student 8	5	24	19
Student 9	3	24	21
Student 10	0	12	12
Student 11	5	24	19
Student 12	3	12	9
Student 13	0	24	24
Student 14	24	24	0
Student 15	0	18	18
Student 16	0	22	22
Student 17	0	6	6
Student 18	6	24	18
Student 19	3	24	21
Student 20	5	24	19
Average	3.2	20.9	17.7

The table below shows the medians of running record scores during the 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 school years. The median is the number that is found in the middle of your set of data when it is organized from lowest to highest. The median raised by 5 levels after the implementation of guided reading.

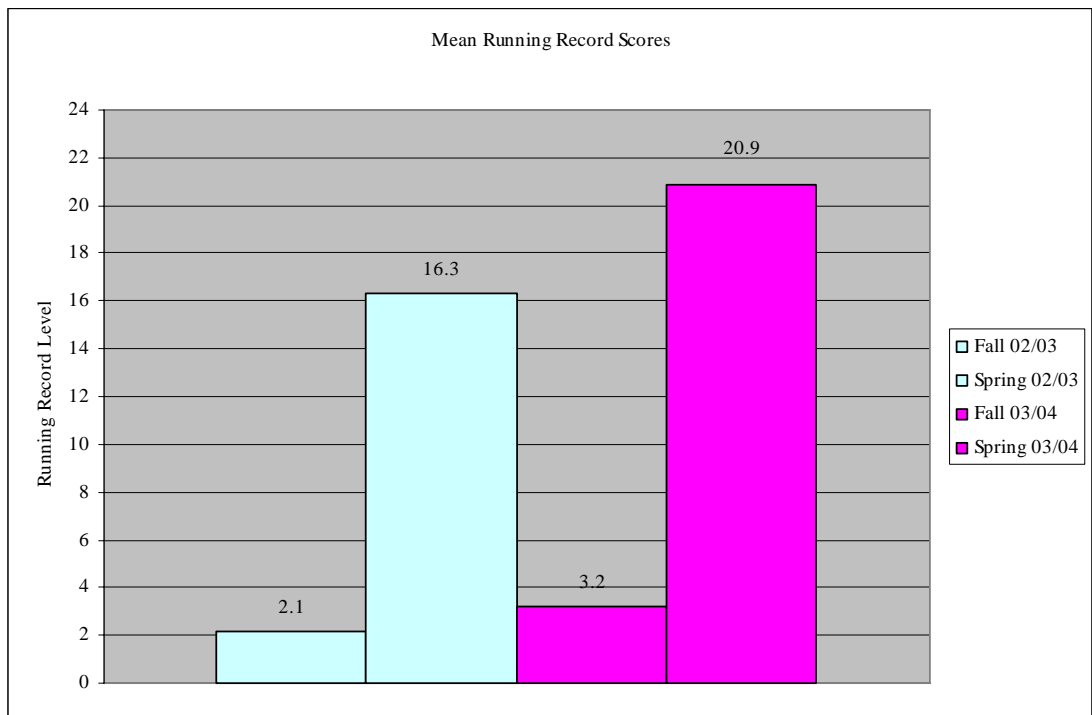
Table 3
Median of Running Records 2002/2003 and 2003/2004

Median of Running Record Scores 2002/2003 and 2003/2004			
Fall 02/03 Median	Spring 02/03 Median	Fall 03/04 Median	Spring 03/04 Median
1	19	2	24

The table below shows the modes of running record scores during the 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 school years. The mode is the number that occurs most often in the data collected. There was a greater increase of growth during the 2003/2004 school year than during the 2002/2003 school year.

Table 4
Mode of Running Records 2002/2003 and 2003/2004

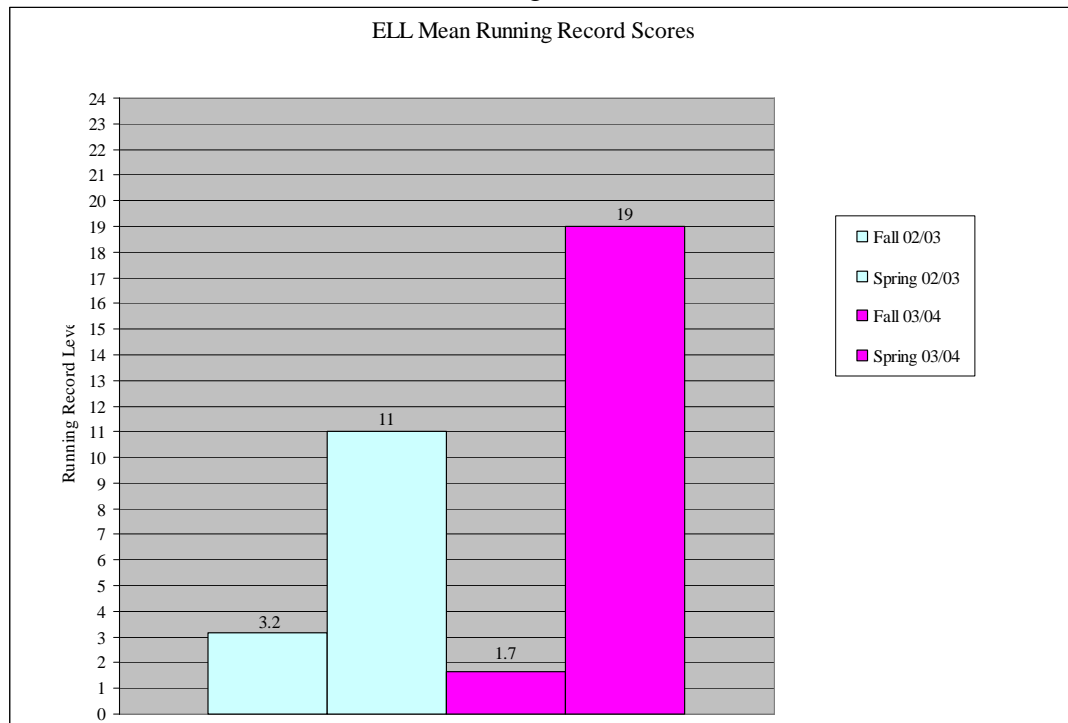
Mode of Running Record Scores 2002/2003 and 2003/2004			
Fall 02/03 Mode	Spring 02/03 Mode	Fall 03/04 Mode	Spring 03/04 Mode
1	24	0	24

Figure1

The above graph shows the comparison between average running record levels during the school years of 2002/2003 and 2003/2004. One can see that at the end of the 2002/2003 school year, the mean running record level was 16.3. At the end of the 2003/2004 school year, the mean running record level was 20.9. A difference of 4.6 levels was realized.

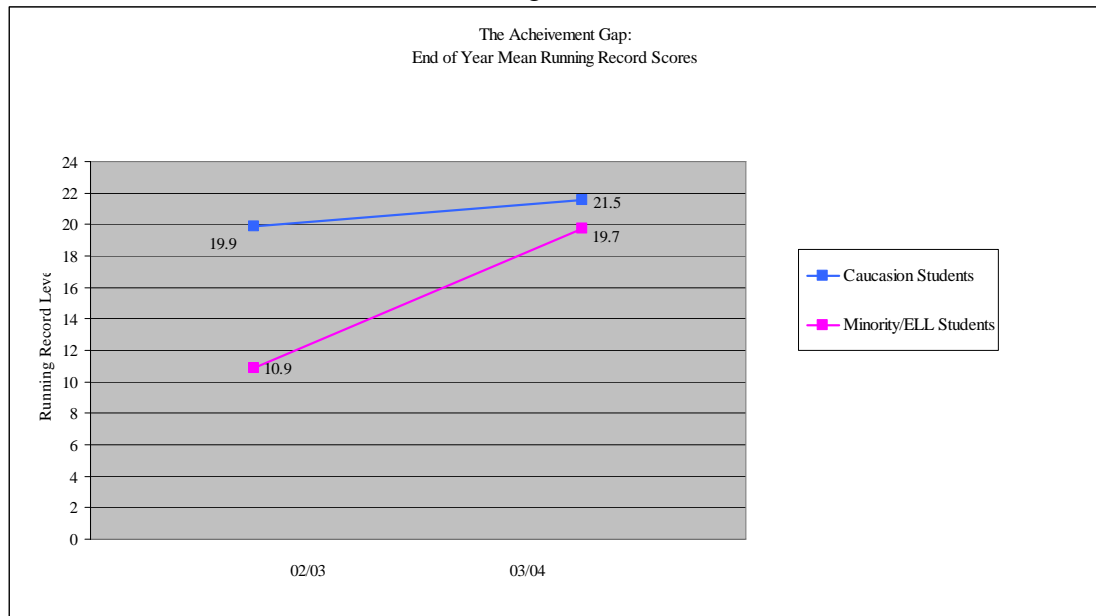
The below graph shows mean running record scores of English Language Learners. ELL students showed average growth of 7.8 levels during the 2002/2003 school year. ELL students showed average growth of 17.3 levels during the 2003/2004 school year. ELL students began at higher levels in 2002/2003 with an average of 3.2 compared to 1.7 in 2003/2004. One can see that at the end of the 2002/2003 school year, the mean running record level of ELL students was 11. At the end of the 2003/2004 school year, the mean running record level was 19. A difference of eight levels can be seen between the end of year results.

Figure 2



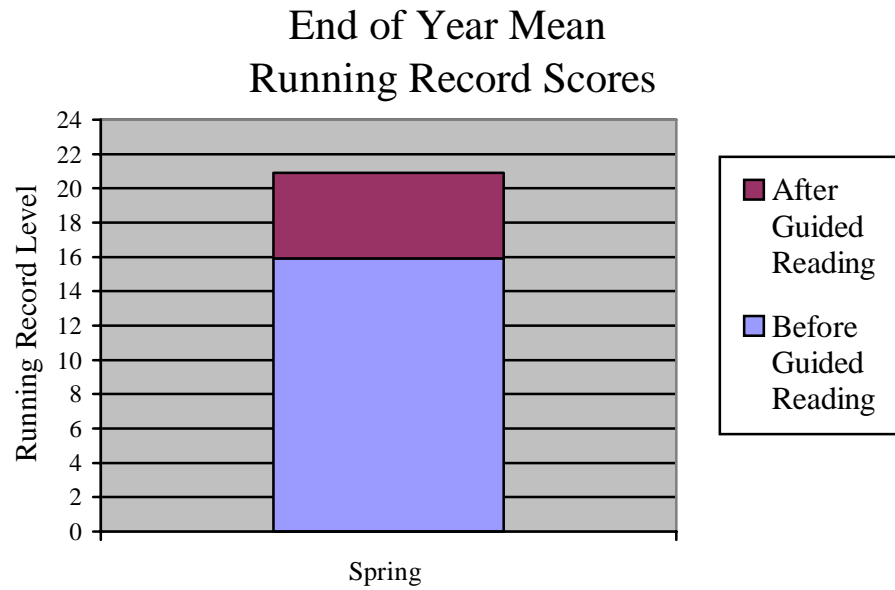
The graph below shows comparisons of white and minority student running records at the end of the 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 school years. The mean score of white students at the end of 2002/2003 was 19.9. The mean score of white students at the end 2003/2004 was 21.5. After guided reading implementation, white students achieved an average of 1.6 levels higher. The mean score of minority and ELL students at the end of 2002/2003 was 10.9. The mean score of minority and ELL students at the end of 2003/2004 was 19.7. After guided reading implementation, minority and ELL students achieved at an average of 8.8 levels higher.

Figure 3



The graph below shows the growth and improvement in mean end of year running record scores before guided reading and after guided reading.

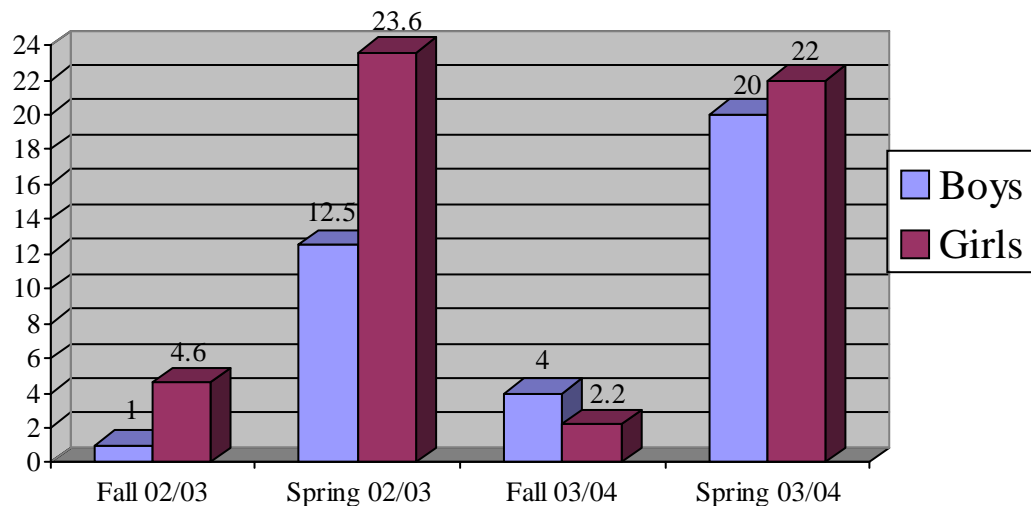
Figure 4



The graph below shows a comparison of boys and girls mean running record scores for the fall and spring of 2002/2003 and 2003/2004. Boys' average level in reading at the end of the 2002/2003 school year was 12.5, while girls had an average of 23.6. Boys' average level in reading at the end of the 2003/2004 school year was 20, while girls had an average of 22. Boys showed an average of 11.5 levels of growth from fall to spring in the 2002/2003 school year. Boys showed an average of 16 levels of growth from fall to spring during the 2003/2004 school year. Girls showed an average of 19 levels of growth from fall to spring in the 2002/2003 school year. Girls showed an average of 19.8 levels of growth from fall to spring during the 2003/2004 school year.

Figure 5

Mean Running Record Scores Boys vs Girls



The following two graphs demonstrate the percentage of students who did and did not meet end of year requirements on running record assessments. It can be seen that in the spring of 2002/2003, 38% of students did not meet the goal of a score of 16 on running record assessments, while 62% did meet year end goal. In the spring of 2003/2004 school year, after guided reading implementation, only 20% of students did not meet the end of year goal, while 80% of students did. An increase of 18% of students met the year end goal after guided reading practices were adopted.

Figure 6

Spring 2002/2003

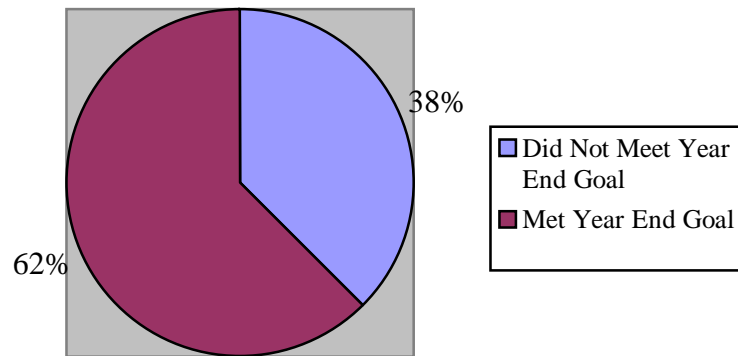
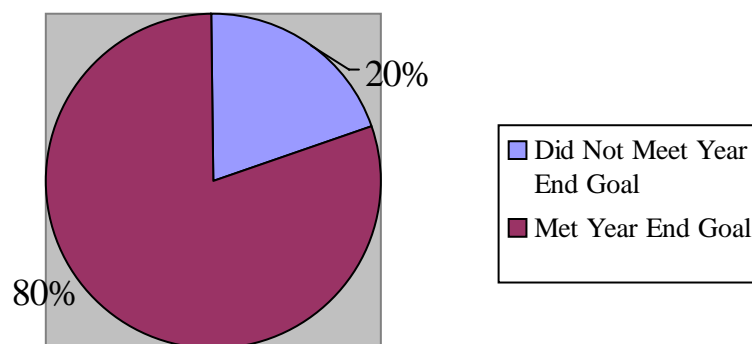


Figure 7

Spring 2003/2004



V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A. Summary

This study has effectively proven that running record scores improved as a result of adopting a guided reading program. Results of the study and conclusions based on these results indicate that guided reading raised the bar for all students, while at the same time improving achievement in minority, male, and English Language Learner populations.

B. Conclusions

This study asked if the implementation of guided reading would improve running record scores. Data has shown that guided reading improved running record scores on end of year assessments. Student growth may have been influenced by not only guided reading, but also other components of reading instruction such as shared reading, read aloud and independent reading.

Overall, students achieved better on running record assessments after guided reading. After guided reading implementation, more students reached year end goals and students attained higher average levels. The mean, mode and median showed that overall students attained running record scores that exceeded first grade expectations. The majority of students were reading at second grade levels, many were at a level 24. Seventy percent, 14 out of 20 students, reached end of second grade expectations. Unfortunately, students are not able to be assessed past a level 24, which is the end of second grade year expectation. Based on teacher observation and daily work, many students were reading at levels even higher than 24, but that could not be accurately reported without an assessment.

Data showed dramatic results for boys, minority, and ELL students. Without guided reading instruction, boys on average were not meeting the end of first grade expectation. After guided reading, boys met and surpassed year end expectations. Data showed amazing results that gave evidence of the closing of the achievement gap. During the 2002/2003 school year, there was a gap of nine levels between minority students and white students. During the 2003/2004 school year, there was only a gap of 1.8 levels. ELL students also benefited from the adoption of guided reading. ELL students' spring averages increased from 11 to 19. English Language Learners went from not achieving end of year goals to surpassing them.

Other unexpected outcomes were also observed as a result of implementing guided reading. Student self concept was affected, especially the self concepts of students with lower ability levels. They felt good about themselves, knowing that they could succeed in reading. Student work time at centers encouraged a sense of independence in students. By the end of the year, many student groups were functioning completely on their own at centers without the direct assistance of the teacher.

C. Recommendations

Based on what this study revealed about student achievement in reading due to the implementation of guided reading, it is recommended that a guided reading program should be continued to be in practice and hopefully expanded. Continued research and investigation into guided reading should be conducted to keep abreast of changes that could improve the program.

Recommendations to others who would like to conduct similar studies are to not only collect quantitative data, but also qualitative. It would be beneficial to have student testimonials or possibly surveys to give evidence of other effects of implementation. For example, qualitative data may have revealed the impact on student self concept and enthusiasm. It would also be beneficial to conduct this action research on a larger scale and in a broad range of grade levels. Future studies might also benefit from having two groups of students in the same classroom during the same school year receive two different methods of reading instruction.

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APPENDIX A
Running Record Scores Fall and Spring of 2002/2003 and 2003/2004

Running Record Scores			
Fall 02/03	Spring 02/03	Fall 03/04	Spring 03/04
1	7	2	24
1	16	1	24
3	24	2	24
0	3	2	24
2	24	0	12
1	16	2	24
2	24	1	24
3	24	5	24
4	22	3	24
0	5	0	12
0	3	5	24
14	24	3	12
0	5	0	24
1	24	24	24
1	24	0	18
1	16	0	22
		0	6
		6	24
		3	24
		5	24

APPENDIX B
Average Running Record Scores Fall and Spring of 2002/2003 and 2003/2004
Boys Versus Girls

Mean Running Record Scores				
	Fall 02/03	Spring 02/03	Fall 03/04	Spring 03/04
Boys	1	12.5	4	20
Girls	4.6	23.6	2.2	22

APPENDIX C
End of Year Running Record Scores
White Students Compared to Minority/ELL Students

End of Year Running Record Scores			
Caucasian Students	Caucasian Students	Minority/ELL Students	Minority/ELL Students
Spring 02-03	Spring 03-04	Spring 02-03	Spring 03-04
16	24	7	24
24	24	22	12
3	24	5	24
24	24	3	24
16	24	24	12
24	24	5	18
24	12	10	24
24	24		
24	24		
	22		
	6		
	24		
	24		

APPENDIX D
Running Record Scores of English Language Learners
Fall and Spring of 2002/2003 and 2003/2004

Running Record Scores of ELL Students			
Fall 02/03	Spring 02/03	Fall 03/04	Spring 03/04
1	22	2	24
4	5	0	12
0	3	2	24
0	24	0	12
14	5	0	18
0	7	6	24